







A Blue-tiled Mosque at Soh, near Isfahan

*(From a sketch by Miss J. Biggs)*

# PERSIA

## OLD AND NEW

BY THE REV.

W. WILSON CASH

*Author of The Expansion of Islam and  
The Moslem World in Revolution*

CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY  
SALISBURY SQUARE, LONDON, E.C. 4

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To my friends of the Persia Mission,  
whose life and work was such an  
inspiration to me, and who at all  
times in my tour showed me a wealth  
of kindness, a patience, and a love  
that I shall always cherish, this  
volume is gratefully dedicated.



## FOREWORD

**I**T was my happy experience to visit Persia in April and May, 1928. My tour carried me over 5000 miles by motor car, and I visited all the C.M.S. centres of work, as well as several stations of the American Presbyterian Mission. I was entertained by British, Americans, and Persians, and to my many kind hosts and hostesses I would express again my grateful thanks.

The work I saw in this C.M.S. field filled me with admiration for that splendid band of missionaries, old and young, who to-day are the worthy successors of those who laid the foundation upon which they build. I was much impressed by the thoroughness of the work ; by the efficiency of schools and hospitals ; by the initiative that is being shown in breaking new ground and adapting methods to changing conditions of life in Persia ; by the desire I found on all hands to make the Church the centre of all activity, and to accord to it that right of control that alone will enable it to grow strong and free ; but most of all was I impressed by the spirit of prayer and devotion that lay behind every effort. " Pray one for another " is a command that finds a literal obedience in the Persia Mission. Every one prays for every one else, and all the converts of the Church from the time of their first inquiry are regularly remembered in prayer by the whole Church.

The outlook is promising, though there are not lacking ominous clouds of secularism and Bolshevism, both dangers to the work. The Church at home has now a great opportunity of advance. How long it will last it is impossible to say, but if we go forward now, a rich harvest awaits those who labour in Persia. The day may come when missionaries will once more be compelled to leave the country. But if this should happen may it be that they will leave behind them so virile a Church that the evangelization of Persia will still go on, and the Persian Christians will be able to continue to build upon the solid foundation laid.



Persia itself is in transition, and no less is the Church there also in transition. The country is passing through all the growing pains of a people who for centuries have stagnated, and are now alive and awake to their dangers, their needs, and their future. The Church has been under the tutelage of a foreign body, and it is passing out of European control into the new phase of self-government! It will make mistakes, but, given adequate support and guidance now, it will grow into the biggest power for good in Persia. The people are friendly, open, and accessible, and wherever I went I met with nothing but the utmost courtesy and kindness from Persians, from the customs officials at the frontier, to leaders of the towns I visited. There is nothing the Church cannot accomplish if it will rise to this call of God in the same spirit of prayer, devotion, and sacrifice as is being shown by the missionaries and the young Church in Persia.

I came home with a deepened conviction of the power of God to save and to transform lives and characters. The Gospel carries its own evidence, and has only to be seen in action in these distant mission fields for one to learn anew that Christ still works in the hearts and lives of men. The Cross still draws men to God in penitence and prayer, and the Bible is still the Word of God, quick and powerful, convincing men of sin, and leading them from darkness to light.

I saw all this in the changed lives of Persian converts ; but as I sit at home now I feel that the revival of spiritual power and the blessing of the Holy Spirit that one witnessed demand of us in England a corresponding revival and a quickening of spiritual life in our midst, if we are to answer the call and to be true to the trust committed to us by Christ.

I put out this little volume, conscious of its many shortcomings, in the hope that it may help those who are supporting the work of the C.M.S., to see how wonderfully God is blessing the work of the Society in this, one of the hardest of fields abroad.

W. WILSON CASH

*December, 1928*

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*Persia Pictures* (C.M.S., price 2d.) has a number of new photographs which illustrate this book.



## CHAPTER I

### THE COMING OF A NEW DAY

**I**N the spring of 1928 while travelling through Persia I camped one night amid the ruins of ancient Persepolis, the old capital of the country in the days of Darius. It was then regarded as a city beyond compare in both beauty and wealth, and was the glory of the East. Darius Hystaspes, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes all contributed to its aggrandizement. The great hall of Xerxes and the palace of Darius were masterpieces of architectural skill. They were built in dark grey marble, cut into gigantic square blocks and beautifully polished. At the portals stood figures of animals fifteen feet high, similar in style to the Assyrian bulls of Nineveh. The great hall was the largest and probably the most magnificent structure the world has ever seen. It covered about two acres and a half.

Here was the centre of a vast empire, the home of a great civilization, and the heart of a nation that had extended its influence from India to the Danube. The palace was built upon a lofty platform, ascended by two great flights of stairs, and it overlooked a plain that stretched for miles, through which flowed the River Araxes (now known as Bundameer). The land was well watered, and a thriving population covered it with fields of waving corn. It was a centre of wealth and industry, and Persia seemed established as the world's greatest power.

As we lay upon the ground that night, with the moon shining through the ruins, we saw the pillars towering above us. The remains of the old palace were all around us. The sculpture of a once great civilization stared at us pathetically, and the writings on the walls spoke eloquently of a lost glory. The stillness of the night was broken by no marching of troops as in days of old. Not a light was to be seen across the plain, and the quietness was that of the desert, not of a people

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hushed in sleep. As the sun rose, and the whole place lay bathed in light, the beauty and grandeur of the scene broke upon us ; but with it came a sadness. The once fertile land was a desert ; the populous capital had become an empty waste. There were no signs of life, nor of cultivation ; no villages or towns dotted the landscape. It was the haunt of nomadic tribes on trek, and of caravans carrying merchandise to the northern towns. The glory had indeed departed. Persia's ancient pomp had passed away, and we saw a picture of stagnation, decay, and ruin, as far as the eye could travel. As we stood among the remaining pillars of this ancient capital, one stone arrested our attention. Around it was cut an inscription which read : " I am a stone in the palace of Darius, the king of kings." How proud the builders were of their craft ! One imagines one stonemason, filled with the glory of it all, feeling that even the stones must have a sense of pride in so great a building, and, trying to voice what the stone would say, he had carved this inscription. Every one and everything, even the stones, had a share in a great national achievement. Yet it had all passed away, only the ghosts of an ancient race seemed to haunt the ruins.

We stepped from the palace to the edge of the platform to look again across the plain, and one sign of life, very significant though simple, arrested our attention. A new road had been constructed which ran almost from the palace steps to mountains some miles away. In imagination we had tried to reconstruct the past, but this road brought us back to the present. It was symbolical of Persia's new effort to recover something of a lost culture, and of her demand for a civilization that would open a new era of glory to her people. A stone in the palace of Darius and a new motor road seem to have nothing in common, but on closer investigation they certainly express a similar aspiration.

I had travelled up from Baghdad in stages to Isfahan, and from there I had come by motor down to Persepolis, a little more than 100 miles from the Persian Gulf, and everywhere I had seen Persian peasants busily engaged in road-making. Hundreds of miles of new roads were being opened in all parts

of the country. With feverish activity the most distant parts of Persia were being linked by new means of transport to Tehran, the modern capital. The stone and the road were symbolical of Darius of the fifth century B.C. and of Riza Shah, the ruler of modern Persia. Just as all these new roads led to Tehran, so every new sign of progress and life seemed to point to the outstanding personality of a man who, having grasped boldly the reins of office, is determined to lead his people to a new and glorious day for Persia. The roads served to illustrate a new centralized Government that could make its order run in the most distant provinces. We leave ancient Persia for the moment to study the country to-day.

The rise of Riza Khan to power is one of the most romantic episodes in Persian history. In November, 1925, the reigning Shah, Sultan Ahmad, was deposed. He had come to the throne in days of stagnation and ease. He had never sensed the changing conditions of life, nor the rising tide of popular demands. A republican movement developed, and still the Shah could not discern the writing on the wall. In 1924 a crisis arose that threatened revolution, and the danger was only averted by the influence of Moslem *mullahs*,<sup>1</sup> who used all their power to save the dynasty. Riza Khan had been the leader of the revolutionary party, and a year later, having given up his republicanism, he accomplished his purpose by having himself appointed as Shah.

In point of fact, monarchy and republicanism were words without serious significance. What mattered was that a dictator had arisen who intended to rule by himself, to save the country from disaster. He took the oath to preserve the constitution, and to govern through an elected parliament, but he knew that parliament, as in Turkey, could be bent to his will and need not fetter his autocracy.

Who then is this man who has founded a new dynasty, taking as its title the ancient name Pahlevi? Twenty-four years ago he was a soldier in the ranks of the Persian army; to-day he is Shah. He has risen from the lowest rank of a conscript to the throne, and he owes this to his own industry,

<sup>1</sup> Men learned in theology or sacred law, the term used of those who officiate in the mosques.

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energy, and military capacity. How he first gained his commission in the army is uncertain, but once graded as an officer, his rise to power was phenomenal. In 1921 he was a colonel, and carried out successfully a *coup d'état* when he marched with his regiment upon Tehran, dismissed the Cabinet, and ordered the formation of a new Government, in which he himself appeared as Minister of War. The peacock throne of Persia is almost the oldest in the world, for it goes back to the days of Cyrus the Great, but the weakness and indolence of successive Shahs had led to corruption in the land, and had exposed it to intrigue from without. The national revival through which Persia had been passing had had no support from the throne, and a new day dawned when Riza Khan came into power and led an awakened nation in a great renaissance.

In order to understand the new currents of thought in Persia, let us look at a map of the country (see p. viii). Persia is bordered by Iraq, Turkey, Russia, Afghanistan, and India. Trade routes from these lands into Persia were also channels of thought, and although the country had been isolated, without roads or railways, and had been stagnant and under the domination of Moslem religious leaders for a long period, the events in other lands began to awaken in the youth of Persia revolutionary ideas. After the war a divided people with little sense of nationhood roused themselves in a demand for constitutional reforms. They saw that divided loyalties made the country weak, and it was these ideas that led to the rebirth of the nation.

Iraq had acquired, through British help, independence and a parliament. Turkey had passed through the disaster of the great war only to emerge more free from western domination than before 1914. The revolution that overthrew the House of Othman, drove out the Caliph of Islam, abolished Moslem law, established a new legal code on western lines, disestablished and disendowed the Moslem religion, closed the Dervish monasteries, and set Turkey's feet upon the path of secular progress, had not been without its influence upon Persia. Both countries were Moslem though belonging to different

Islamic sects. Both had been largely controlled by religious leaders. Both had had the Koran as the basis of law, and both showed the same tendencies to break away from tradition, and to turn their faces westward. The leaders of Persian thought deny that their policy of reforms has been influenced by Turkey, but they agree that the elements in Turkish life that brought about the revolution are also operative in Persia.

Pursuing our study of the map we next notice the significance of Russia and the Caspian Sea upon the northern frontier of Persia. When Riza Khan was proclaimed Shah it was feared by some that this would be the prelude to the advance of Bolshevism. Russia at that time made a great bid for Persia. A Russo-Persian treaty had been signed at Moscow in 1921, by the terms of which Russia cancelled the large debt due from Persia, and handed over at the same time all Russian concessions in Persia free of cost. These included such things as quays, roads, and railways around the Caspian and Tabriz. Here was another stream of thought. Russia stood for secular civilization, and Persia as a Moslem country was at the time susceptible to secularizing influences.

There were thus currents and cross currents of new thought in Persia, which culminated in the appointment of Riza Khan as Shah. The important thing after the coronation was the reconstruction of the country. One of the first steps was to establish order and security in the land. Lawlessness had been a byword in Persia. Few travellers in the past thirty years have not experienced the perils of brigands who infested the roads. Robberies were of daily occurrence, and life was cheap. The new Shah opened police posts everywhere, and brigands were shot without mercy whenever they were captured. In a remarkably short time the authority of the Shah was acknowledged, brigandage to a large extent ceased, and it was surely a sign of the changed conditions that I was able to travel all over Persia in 1928, often on long journeys by night, without once meeting with any would-be brigands. Wherever we went I noticed the new sense of security. Road



construction has played a large part in this new order, and now a railway is being planned which will run from the Caspian through Tehran and Hamadan to the Gulf. A scheme is also under consideration for building a barrage at Ahwaz across the Karun River, in order to revive the cotton industry. Security, new roads, and railways, all mean new trade, prosperity, and peace in the land.

Another reform demanded by all Persians is education. Under the new Shah schools have been opened for boys in every town and in many of the villages. Girls' education has also received a great impetus, and to-day many thousands of boys and girls are being introduced into a new world of thought and life that is affecting the whole mental outlook of the nation. An educational scheme has been adopted for sending Persian students to Europe. A hundred are to go to Europe immediately, and next year it is hoped to send 200. The number is to be increased annually until 600 students are studying in Europe.

To look at Persian women in the streets, dressed as they are in black shrouds, one would imagine that here at any rate is the old conservatism, and reform has not penetrated to the womanhood of Persia. While the veil is still the general rule for women, education is the mother of a feminist movement which is gaining ground daily. In the past it was only occasionally that Persia produced a well-educated woman. Greatly daring, a father would send his daughter when very young to a school for small boys, or possibly he would bring a teacher to his house. In this case the girl had to sit, completely covered in a black garment, with her back to the teacher. The general opinion then was that a woman had no brains, and teachers often refused to waste their time teaching a girl.

The change that has taken place is at once apparent when we remember that in every city in Persia there are to-day one to four girls' schools. Women have now the opportunity for study, sewing, physical exercise, and friendly association. This may seem a small matter to western women, but to Persian girls who formerly were never in any house other than their own, and who never associated with other girls,

it is revolutionary. Among the higher-class ladies there is much more evidence of progress. I was invited one day to call upon a leading family. I went with a woman missionary, and as it was my first experience of a cultured Persian lady, I naturally wondered what would happen.

We arrived at a mansion standing in the midst of a beautiful garden. The husband was away, but the lady received us in her drawing room, and in good English talked perfectly naturally. She wore a pretty European dress, and of course had discarded the veil. While she poured out tea, my eyes wandered over the luxurious room. The family were Moslems in name, but I could not find a single trace of Islam anywhere. Nothing in the house or conversation would have shown that here was one of the old Moslem homes of Persia. Later on I had other opportunities of seeing the inside of Moslem homes, and I always came away feeling that the leaders in Persia were determined to emancipate the women, and to raise them to their rightful place in home and country. "In Persia in 1909 an article in a Tabriz paper on the emancipation of women drew an angry mob round the author's house, threatening him with crucifixion, from which fate he was rescued by the authorities, who clapped him into prison by way of saving his life. To-day the busy journalism of Persia includes at least one woman's journal, edited by a Persian woman, and a large output of patriotic literature."<sup>1</sup>

Actual progress may seem small to the visitor to Persia. Education is still very backward, but the significance lies not in the point now reached, but in the sudden curve of increase after centuries that have been static and unchanging.

Reforms have followed one another in rapid succession, a new zeal for education was the forerunner of a complete overhauling of the medical service in Persia. Commissions have been appointed, and all who profess to be doctors are being examined, in order to eliminate the large number of men who practise medicine without possessing the necessary qualifications. In every direction the new Shah is making changes, and the people have embarked upon a voyage of discovery.

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Literature in Moslem Lands* p. 26.

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Behind all is a driving force of a new nationalism. This spirit of nationalism takes the form, as in other Moslem lands, of a break with past tradition, and a demand for the unfettered control of Persian affairs by Persians. The old treaties conferring extra-territorial rights upon foreigners have been abolished. New treaties are being made with the great powers. The election of Persia to a seat on the League of Nations Council is a significant fact. Thus it comes about that this once-isolated land is now intermingling in thought and culture with the western world. The new constitution upon which so many set their hopes may seem crude to us.

Methods of democracy are startlingly unlike anything the West knows to-day. For example, in one important province I asked a high official how many seats there were in parliament representing the province, and he said five. "How many candidates?" I asked. "Three hundred," he replied. I commented on the difficulty, in a general election when the majority of the people are illiterate and unused to any electoral system, of choosing five men out of three hundred. Three-cornered elections in England seemed child's play in comparison. But the answer was rapped out sharply: "There is no difficulty whatever; I have already selected the members to be chosen, and the people will do as I tell them!" This might not suit Europe, but under existing circumstances it is probably the best thing for Persia.

Here is a nation experimenting with a new order of government, in search of something yet to be attained, moving forward towards a goal it does not clearly see. Islam lies behind. The present materialism and secularism cannot hold the people permanently. What is the hope for the future. With all this transformation, which is likely to increase in the next few years, will there be a corresponding change in Persia's spiritual outlook? Is the spirit of the nation to be transformed as well as the body? Can Persia find a faith that satisfies? We believe that in and through Christ Persia can find the goal of its aspirations, the object of the present quest, and the anchor of the soul that will lead the people forward to a new and glorious day in its history.

## CHAPTER II

### RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN PERSIA

**I** SAT one day talking with a man who knew Persia as few men do, one who could count as his personal friends the highest in the land, and I asked him what he thought of Islam to-day. His reply was : " Islam is dead." He went on to explain that while the illiterate people are still strongly Moslem yet the educated people are non-Moslem in thought and rapidly becoming anti-Moslem. Looking into the future he could see no hope whatever for Islam in Persia. I then put a second question. " Do you think the Persians will drift into pure secularism ? " Again he gave a startling answer. " No," he said, " they are too religious to remain materialists for long. But some day a people will come to this land with a religion that suits them and they will accept it."

It was in the seventh century that the Arabs began their first assault upon the might of Persia, bringing with them the faith of Islam. Khalid marched up the Euphrates with a small army of 9000. With varying fortunes these sons of the desert went forward until they inflicted a crushing defeat on Persia and captured at Ctesiphon wealth beyond their wildest dreams. Further victories followed until the great Persian Empire disappeared and the country became an Arab dependency.

Victory on the field of battle was followed by dissension and schism among the followers of Islam. The Moslem world was split into two and Persians espoused the cause of Ali and ultimately became known as Shiahs, or the followers of Ali. To the strictly orthodox disciples of the Prophet they may have been members of a heretical sect ; be that as it may, the pride of Persia was laid low, its grandees became subjects of the Arabs. Previously Zoroastrianism, based on the ancient fire worship, had been the national faith, and while the people as a whole nominally accepted Islam they sought to adapt it

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to their own needs and temperament, not entirely abandoning their old faith and religious literature. Zoroastrianism has never been destroyed in Persia, and still claims some 10,000 adherents, principally in and around Yezd and Kerman.

Christianity was introduced into Persia in very early days and spread rapidly. During the reign of Marcus Aurelius there were no less than twenty-five bishops between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea. It was not long after this, when the Nestorian controversy drove large numbers of Christians out of the Roman Empire into Persia, that this land became the centre of a great missionary enterprise for the conversion of the East, and the Zoroastrians began to fear that the whole of Persia would become Christian. Persecution, which at first only furthered the spread of the Faith, became later on an indiscriminate slaughter, and it is said that 10,000 Christians were put to death. The Moslem invasion completed the destruction of the Church, but to this day there are small communities of Assyrian Christians in different parts of Persia.

The Arab invasion was but the prelude to a series of disasters for Persia. In the thirteenth century the forces of Chengiz Khan swept like an avalanche through the country. Men, women, and children were massacred, towns sacked, and the richest provinces of the land were reduced to a wilderness. In the fourteenth century came Tamerlane and left behind him great cities utterly lifeless and desolate.

Persia, broken and ruined, turned back to its faith for consolation and comfort. The Persians became fanatical followers of Ali and in the prophecies of a coming great one they found hope for the future. They bowed in submission under successive blows to what they conceived to be the will of Allah, and with little contact with the outside world they drifted into stagnation and decline.

In the sixteenth century there came to the court of the Shah at Kazvin an Englishman. This intrepid explorer had travelled across the Caspian Sea and had fearlessly penetrated into Persia. To the Shah he presented a letter from Queen Elizabeth and said he had come to seek for friendship and to open channels of commerce and trade between the two

countries. The omens seemed propitious until this Englishman declared himself a Christian, whereupon the Shah exclaimed : " Oh, thou unbeliever, we have no need to have friendship with unbelievers." The one fact that he was a Christian nearly cost him his life, and Jenkinson, for that was his name, was allowed after repeated insults to leave the country.

This incident in the days of " Good Queen Bess " was typical of the Moslem attitude for centuries towards other faiths. This fanaticism, however, was peculiarly blended with an independence of thought within Islam which always marked off Persian Mohammedanism as different from that of other countries. The fact that they were a heretical sect of Moslems helped to foster new thought, and mysticism found a fruitful field among those who had so many links through Zoroastrianism with eastern cults. Islam produced during these years great souls, saints, and prophets who helped to soften some of the harsher elements of the faith. Al Ghazali was one such, a man of outstanding purity of life and spirituality of thought. On the other hand Persia also gave to the world great poets who were agnostic in mind and material in outlook. The most famous of these was Omar Khayyam. His creed was to eat, drink, and be merry, and he lampooned the tenets of Islam in verse. In one of his revels he said :—

We make the wine-jar's lip our place of prayer  
And drink in lessons of true manhood there,  
And pass our lives in taverns, if perchance  
The time misspent in mosques we may repair.

In paradise are Houris as you know,  
And fountains that with wine and honey flow.  
If these be lawful in the world above  
What harm to love the like down here below.

Thus from greatness Persia fell upon evil days. Disasters crushed out initiative and enterprise. Fanaticism closed the trade routes of the world. Islam was powerless to regenerate the country, and fatalism either led to a dull content with things as they were or it threw men into a careless agnosticism where all religion was regarded as superfluous.

In home life Islam had had a baneful influence. A system

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of temporary marriages was sanctioned by law, and a man was able while visiting a town to contract a marriage for the length of his stay. This might be a month or more, but at the will of the husband a divorce could be arranged at any convenient period. In addition to this the law of Islam as sanctioning polygamy was commonly practised, and home life was the negation of home as we know it. Child marriages were common and the woman was regarded as an inferior being, the plaything or the chattel of her husband, the drudge in the house. A thick, black veil had to be worn out of doors and a woman's life was pervaded with an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. No one bothered to attempt to educate her because there seemed no value in wasting money on so profitless a task. The law of the land made Islam the only recognized faith and apostasy was punishable with death.

In the nineteenth century a reform movement was initiated by Mirza Ali Mohammed who declared himself to be the *Bab*, or door, the true way of approach to God. Large numbers of people rallied round him, and the growth of the movement was not checked when it was denounced as heretical and its founder was arrested and put to death. A period of fierce persecution followed, and on one day men, women, and children were butchered in the streets of Tehran simply because they were Babis, and hundreds of simple, earnest people perished in a wave of fanatical fury.

Islam was dominant, and behind everything lay the strong hand of the mullahs who ruled the people in the name of their prophet and guided life along the conservative channels of the faith. The power of the mullahs was very great, but all through history there has been an element in revolt against the ruling religious leaders. Persecution has always failed to suppress independent thought completely, and the Babis lived through their days of trial only to emerge stronger than before. Soon they were to be found in every walk in life. From the highest officials to the most menial servants there were followers of the Bab. Here then was an element in Persian life disturbing to the mullahs but full of significance

to the country. The Babis by their courage laid the foundation of a new religious liberty in Persia. The law of apostasy became largely inoperative.

After the death of the Bab the movement was led by Bahaullah, and thus came to be known as Bahaism. Bahaullah means the splendour of God, and the followers of this sect developed an eclectic faith which drew largely upon the New Testament for its idealism. It was to be a union of all faiths and thus aimed at uniting Christians, Jews, and Moslems in a common brotherhood.

When I was in Persia I was very much struck with the propaganda methods of the Bahais. They seemed to have captured the postal service, for wherever one went the postal officials, from those in high positions to the drivers of the post office vans and carts, were largely Bahais. They thus travelled all over the country and as they delivered letters they preached their faith. Picture a motor van carrying mails from Isfahan to Shiraz. The bags are packed at the bottom of the van and all around them are Persian travellers who pay a small fee for a seat. One postman sits among them and he very likely is a Bahai. Hour after hour the car bumps over the rough roads and all the way the discussion goes on, the postman using every opportunity of commending his faith. He is a born propagandist, and while employed in postal work he can combine the work of a voluntary evangelist.

Here then is another of the currents of thought in Persia. There are probably about half a million Bahais in the country. They are aggressive and organized. They seek to spread their faith among Jews, Parsis, and Christians as well as Moslems. Regular meetings are held and every Bahai is regarded as a propagandist. In recent years there has been a distinct slowing down in the progress of this sect. Among the Jews the movement seems to be at a standstill. Many who embrace Bahaism leave it after a time because they do not find behind the high sounding words and phrases any moral or regenerating power, and what Persia is seeking is a renewal of moral power in the nation.



In the previous chapter I spoke of Persia as an awakened nation, and to understand the present conditions aright we must relate these new progressive elements to this background and this religious thought of life.

A writer in a paper published in Tabriz recently speaks boldly of the causes of the decline of Islam, and he places his finger upon Islam itself as the primary cause of its own decay. Persia once having awakened from the slumber of centuries saw hope in change. Age-long Moslem customs were attacked not simply as unsuited to this age but as wrong in themselves. As a protest against Islam's segregation of the sexes, meetings were held in Tehran where men and women sat and talked together, where a common meal was arranged and the women unveiled sat with the men. Here were two changes, the discarding of the veil, a custom so rigidly adhered to by Moslems for centuries, and the mutual friendship upon a basis of equality of men and women.

One small but very significant change in the attitude of Moslems to people of other faiths I noticed in the form of salutation. The greeting between Moslem and Moslem is "*Salaam Alaikum* (Peace be on you)." No Moslem would say this to a Christian because there could be no peace on an "unbeliever." I had often in Egypt found that the use of this salutation by a Christian roused Moslems to fierce anger. Yet as I travelled through Persia I heard everywhere Moslems saluting Christians with the beautiful words: "Peace be on you." Twenty years ago a Moslem would frequently refuse to shake hands with a Christian; to-day they not only shake hands in the friendliest way but give Christians the oriental kiss, a mark of real affection.

Perhaps the most outstanding impression of my tour was the general dissatisfaction with Islam as a working faith of practical value to modern life. Persians look back with pride to the days of Darius and Cyrus and they look forward with hope into the future but they do not see in the centuries during which Islam has dominated their thought and life anything that commends itself; and the intelligentsia blame the leaders of Islam for the decay of the country. The mullahs have only

themselves to thank for their unpopularity. They have strenuously opposed every reform. They have failed to show that moral character which alone could command respect to-day, and they and their faith are relegated by thinking Persians to the museum of fossilized life. Young Persia no longer thinks in Moslem terms. Its thought life is non-Moslem, modern, progressive, and national. In this reaction against Islam thousands are drifting into secularism which makes them often hostile in their attitude to this old faith. An awakened youth demands social service as a way to national regeneration, and the complete absence of such activity among Moslem religious leaders makes it turn away in disgust.

The spirit of the constitution is a serious blow to Islam. The people appointed their Shah. He is one of themselves, a man among men, and the constitution does ideally mean freedom, equality, and brotherhood. Increasingly Persians are coming to see that Islam and the constitution are contradictory methods of government.

About ninety miles south of Tehran there stands the famous mosque of Kum. This mosque is one of the architectural glories of Persia. The rich designs of its tiling, the golden dome, and the towering minarets all make this building one of the finest specimens of Moslem art in the world. Here traditions have been built up. The mosque is a stronghold of the faith. The town is filled with its mullahs and the voice of Islam from Kum has for long been with authority. Not even the Shahs dared to defy the power of this place. The mosque is a "city of refuge," a sanctuary for the criminal. A man who has committed some serious crime will flee to the mosque. If he can outstrip his pursuers and reach the sacred precincts first he is safe. The sheltering arm of Islam is over him and no policeman dares to defy the mullah and arrest a man within the mosque.

This year (1928) at the feast of Non-Ruz a great service was being held. The preacher was a mullah famous for his conservative attitude to the changes in the country. In the gallery was sitting the wife of the Shah with her ladies in attendance. She had thrown back her veil while she listened to the sermon.

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The preacher began to denounce modern tendencies in Persia. He went over one by one the changes that were leading people away from Islam until, pointing to the gallery, he denounced the women of to-day for their slackness in Moslem customs and for their modern ways. A man in the audience thinking that the mullah was unaware of the presence of the Shah's wife went up to the pulpit and warned him to be careful. This made the preacher renew his attack upon feminist movements. The Shah's wife, highly incensed and angry, withdrew from the mosque in the middle of the attack. She at once telephoned to the Shah at Tehran and told him what had happened. Here was a test of strength, the gauntlet had been thrown down and the Shah challenged to combat against the might of this sacred mosque. He quickly grasped the meaning of the challenge and decided to take it up and test who was the real ruler in Persia—the Shah or the leaders of Islam.

He motored through to Kum as quickly as possible and, booted and spurred and wearing his sword, he entered the mosque. This first act was a violation of Islam for no-one is permitted to enter a mosque armed or having on boots or shoes. They must be left in the outer court. The Shah walked up to the mullah and after administering a beating to the man he called to his soldiers and had him arrested. He then decided to clean up the mosque and ordered the soldiers to arrest all who were there in hiding from justice. He violated the sanctuary. He dared to do what no other Shah had done before and he defied the organized power of Islam. The mullahs were horrified but they had met their match. They were cowed and frightened. The people raised no voice in their defence and the Shah went on his way, having shown once more his determination to rule and not to share his power with Moslem reactionaries.

The land is in transition, and we ask again : Where is Persia going ? " Some day a people will come to this land with a religion that suits them and they will accept it." Here is a prophecy full of significance for the Church. Is Christianity that faith ?

## CHAPTER III

### SOME OF THE PIONEERS

SINCE the great days of the past when Persia was the highway to India, she has lived in almost unbroken isolation. Occasionally through the centuries a visitor has come from the outside world, as did Jenkinson in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and Persia has usually been ready to avail herself of the help they had to give.

At the close of the sixteenth century two more Englishmen—Sir Anthony Shirley and his brother Robert—visited Kazvin. They were knight adventurers and their arrival in Persia coincided with the reorganization of the Persian army. The Shah engaged these men, and soon under their superintendence batteries of artillery and regiments of infantry were planned. Shah Abbas was the most famous of Persian rulers since the advent of Islam and in the consolidation of his power, the security of life and property he gave, and his patronage of art, he had the support of the two Englishmen who were the first to introduce into Persia the new military inventions of western powers. Three hundred years later Persia secured Belgian help in the management of her customs and engaged Swedes to command her gendarmerie. In 1911 she found that her financial difficulties were ever increasing and she deemed it advisable to invite America's assistance in the reorganization of her finances. From time to time, as we have seen, Russia has pressed her attentions on her neighbour, but generally speaking Persia has preferred to remain aloof and to have little contact with currents of thought and activity outside her own borders.

One stream of influence, small and almost unnoticed, has, however, been slowly finding its way into Persia in the last 120 years. It was in 1811 that a boat pulled into Bushire from India, having on board a young Englishman, who alone

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of all the European visitors to Persia up to his time sought neither political alliances, trade agreements, nor military honour. He was Henry Martyn and, after spending some years in India, he had decided to visit Persia in order to translate the Scriptures into Persian.

In these days when we speak of missionary policy and a world outlook there is something grand in this picture of a man, weak in health, entirely alone, landing in Persia with the one object of giving to its people the Bible in their own tongue. In boldness of purpose few men can compare with Henry Martyn. He had met many Moslems in India, and his plan was to spend only such time as was necessary for his task in Persia, and then to push on across the country through Mesopotamia and to carry the banner of the Cross into Arabia itself.

His first sermon was preached to an English congregation at Bushire. He took for his text : " He must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet." In vision he saw the far horizons of the Kingdom of God, although at that time there was little missionary interest in England. The C.M.S. at this period was a very small society, with an honorary secretary who carried on all the work of the home base in his own private house. Doors were mainly closed to the Gospel abroad, and at home those who advocated the conversion of non-Christian people were regarded as cranks who had embarked upon an impossible enterprise. Henry Martyn donned Persian dress. He wore an astrakhan cap, baggy blue trousers, red boots, and a light chintz tunic, over which was thrown a long flowing coat. Thus equipped he started out on his hundred mile journey from the Gulf to Shiraz.

The house he occupied is still standing and in fact Shiraz has probably changed very little since his day. I passed along the narrow streets through bazaars and talked with Moslems this year in the same town, and outwardly I must have seen almost the same things that Martyn saw over a hundred years ago.

The beginning of a mission is always a puzzle. Environment is strange, the people are unknown, and any step is an

adventure. Martyn laid his plans for translation and then invited the leading men of the town to visit him. There was something very novel to the Persians in a Christian man daring to think that Islam was in any sense a debatable matter. They might argue among themselves about many differences within the world of Mohammedanism, but to call in question the truth of Islam itself was to them unthinkable. Methods of work have changed considerably since Martyn's day, but he blazed the trail for those who should follow and he refused to compromise with those who sought to show that there was little fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. To him the Cross of Christ was central and vital to the faith, and this Moslems denied. In his preaching he demanded a change of heart and conversion through the grace of Christ as an essential, and fearlessly he attacked Islam and exposed its failure.

At first the mullahs showed interest, but they could not long conceal their sense of superiority in the presence of "a dog of a Christian." The Persians are innately courteous and they strove to convert this misguided man to the true fold of Islam. Beaten in argument, the Moslems became irritated and their attitude changed from friendly tolerance to open hostility. People crowded in large numbers to see this strange man until all Shiraz was agog with excitement. Martyn's next step was to hold public controversial meetings. He had now to face the open hatred of the mullahs who feared his teaching, the misunderstanding of those who were convinced that he was a political agent, and of others who were equally convinced that he was playing a deep game. The greatest difficulty came, however, from the moral corruption of the town. Shiraz outwardly fair and beautiful, was the home of vice and evil and men's consciences were seared against all spiritual appeal. Yet even in his day he found many who were disgusted with the corruption around them and longed for a new and purer life, but they feared to hazard their lives by a confession of Christ.

Words he wrote then might with equal truth have been written to-day. "Persia," he said, "is in many respects a

ripe field for harvest. Vast numbers secretly hate and despise the superstitions imposed upon them and as many of them as have heard the Gospel approve it, but they dare not hazard their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus."

The first public discussion turned upon the person of our Lord. A Moslem professor said : " The Jesus we acknowledge is he who was a prophet, a mere servant of God, and one who bare testimony to Mohammed, not your Jesus, Whom you call God." Martyn's quiet and reasoned answers were gravely listened to, but the object of the Moslems was to discredit him in the eyes of Shiraz, and when in the early hours of the morning the meeting broke up there was something like a sensation. Martyn had held his own, enhanced his reputation, and had made a profound impression. To counteract his influence the mullahs published treatises against him challenging his whole position. To these Martyn replied, and thus initiated that vast enterprise of missionary literature which is so widespread to-day. Looking through these tracts now we are struck with the boldness of this gentle-hearted soul.

Difficult days followed when Martyn was stoned and insulted in the streets, but through evil report and good he held on, giving the major portion of each day to his beloved translation work. He had arrived in Shiraz in June, 1811, and in February, 1812, he had completed the translation of the New Testament, and this be it noted at the age of thirty-one !

Two copies of the priceless manuscript were carefully prepared for presentation to the Shah and the heir-apparent. Martyn's work in Shiraz was finished and one morning, mounted on horse-back, he set out for Tehran to present the Scriptures to the Shah in person. The road from Shiraz winds up a hill through a defile and on over the mountain. At the entrance to the pass is a beautiful gate known as the Koran Gate. Standing under the archway the traveller sees the whole of Shiraz spread out in the plain before him. One can imagine Martyn stopping here to obtain his last view of the city. How many memories had been crowded into that brief eight months ! He must have prayed for the day when permanent missionary work would be undertaken there and when with a new liberty

the converts would not fear to confess Christ. He had laid foundations upon which in later years the C.M.S. was to build.

Martyn having arrived at Tehran was invited to a court levée. The vizier (or minister of state) presided in the absence of the Shah, and on hearing of a Christian's arrival he at once invited him to repeat the Moslem creed. Martyn with characteristic boldness replied: "God is God and Jesus is the Son of God." So unexpected was the answer that these dignitaries of the State forgot themselves and rose in wrath and anger. Such a storm was produced that Martyn said: "They rose up as if they would have torn me in pieces."

The cherished object of this journey was not to be attained easily. Martyn found he could only approach the Shah through the British ambassador and this involved a long journey to Tabriz. Can we imagine this man, torn by sickness and fever, worn out with toil, suffering from loneliness and isolation, yet bravely holding to his purpose? We gain some insight into the spiritual conflict of a missionary's life from his journal. At this period he writes: "It is a season of great temptation, darkness and distress. At no period in my life have I stood more in need of divine help, and oh, may I earnestly seek it. Let me cast my burden on the Lord. It is too heavy for me. O Lord let me begin afresh to call upon Thy name, and taking hold of Thee I shall be borne up above my trials and carried through the difficulties I see before me and be delivered."

The manuscript was finally handed over to the British ambassador who presented a copy to His Persian Majesty, making at the time a condition of the presentation *that the Shah would read the whole of it*. The Shah's reply is worth quoting: "If it please the most merciful God we shall command the select servants who are admitted to our presence to read to us the book from beginning to the end that we may, in the most intimate manner, hear and comprehend its contents."

The missionary's task was done. Martyn set out from Tabriz on September 2, 1812, on his last journey, and on



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October 16 of the same year he passed to his rest at Tokat in Armenia.

The first missionary in modern times to Persia had in the space of less than two years given the Persians the New Testament in their own tongue, a monumental work which has been the basis of all that has followed since towards the evangelization of the country. He had shown, too, the power of the printed page through his tracts in Shiraz. He had demonstrated the possibility of a fearless proclamation of the Gospel in a fanatical Moslem town.

At the time of Martyn's death the C.M.S. was planning to move into its first head-quarters. No. 14 Salisbury Square had been taken as the offices of the young society. The Committee had followed Martyn in prayer all through his Persian tour, and through it they had heard the call of the Moslem world and were the first in the Anglican Church to think seriously of Moslem evangelization. They sent out William Jowett, fellow of St. John's, Cambridge, to the Near East as a first step. At home they were by no means idle. They ordered a fount of Persian type to be made and paid for it out of C.M.S. funds, and then presented it to the British and Foreign Bible Society for the printing of Henry Martyn's Persian New Testament.

It seemed a day of opportunity, but the road was barred. A band of missionaries tried to establish work in north-west Persia, but through Russian influence they were expelled from the country. The Persians respected Martyn as a Christian teacher, but they were determined not to have a succession of such men in their country, and for a time no further efforts were made towards the direct evangelization of Persia.

Years rolled by and the C.M.S. extended its activities in West Africa, India, and other parts of the world, but Persia remained untouched. Henry Martyn's prayers seemed to be unanswered for over fifty years, but though the delay was long the answer came. In 1869 Mr. Bruce, a missionary in the Punjab, returned after furlough by the Persian route. He had obtained the consent of the Committee to spend two years in Isfahan to revise Martyn's translation of the New

Testament, and his orders were to go on to India in 1871. Bruce heard the call of Persia and earnestly he prayed for guidance. Arriving in Isfahan he found it was impossible for a Christian to live in the town itself, and he had to reside in the Armenian quarter of Julfa on the other side of the river. Bruce set to work very much on the same lines as Martyn. His allotted period was a few months longer than Martyn's time in Persia. He wondered whether his work too would end as Martyn's had, just another episode with nothing permanent to follow it.

As the two years drew to a close he was increasingly impressed by the opportunities and the heart hunger for God among some of the people. Inquirers were coming regularly for instruction. Would they, like the men in Martyn's day, refuse the Cross because of persecution? To his joy nine Moslems asked for baptism. This he regarded as a sign from God. To him it was the guidance for which he had been seeking, and after further prayer he decided to stay in Persia, trusting that the Committee in London would approve of his action. During that year Persia suffered from a terrible famine and this solitary missionary saw in it the opportunity of a practical demonstration of the Gospel. A fund was opened for famine relief and altogether a sum of over £16,000 was raised. While Persian merchants were seeking to corner grain and make large profits at the expense of dying people, Bruce was toiling day and night to bring comfort and relief to the town that had shut its doors to him on his arrival.

The C.M.S. was now committed to a mission in Persia. It was due to no thought-out policy at home, but to a strange set of circumstances through which God led his servant to see what the Committee at the time could not see, that the hour had come for advance. In 1875 when Bruce came home the Society definitely adopted the policy of missionary work in Persia. More than half a century had gone since Martyn's death. Islam was still all powerful and strongly entrenched, and the call to advance did not hold out any prospects of an immediate victory. There lay before the new missionaries

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years of toil, misunderstanding, and difficulty ; years when the most that could be done was to break down prejudice and to prepare the way for a succeeding generation. It is difficult for people at home to realize the task of a missionary to a Moslem people. These men went out and toiled for years with just a handful of converts, an occasional encouragement but with years of discouraging and seemingly fruitless work. They never failed in their task. Year after year they laboured, in season and out of season, witnessing to the Gospel. It was a labour of love that found inspiration and courage in the Master Who had called them rather than in any successes achieved. In 1875 when some one asked Bruce about his work he said : " I am not reaping the harvest ; I scarcely claim to be sowing the seed ; I am hardly ploughing the soil ; but I am gathering out the stones, that too is missionary work. Let it be supported by loving sympathy and fervent prayer."

The Mission now started began to grow. Between the years 1891-94 five women sailed for Persia, and new openings were developing. By 1896 the C.M.S. had in Persia six clergymen, one doctor, four wives, and six single women. Dr. Bruce completed the translation of the whole Bible in Persian, thus bringing to fruition the task begun in 1811. Mr. St. Clair Tisdall took up the second line of Martyn's work and produced the beginnings of a new Christian literature for Persia. Mary Bird was the pioneer in work among women.

It must not be imagined that this new activity passed unnoticed by Moslem leaders. Mary Bird's work among the women seemed to arouse their anger most of all. Julfa was still the centre of the Mission, but Miss Bird had opened a dispensary in Isfahan which she visited daily. Mullahs preached against her in the mosques, and one morning when she went to the dispensary she found it locked and nailed up. Was this the end of a brave effort to carry comfort to suffering womanhood? The women took up the matter. Miss Bird went back and was petitioned to dispense medicines in the street. This could not be done, but she went on to

the dispensary and to her surprise found it open. Inside stood an almost nude, fiendish looking man to prevent her entry, but she walked straight up to him, and to her surprise he dropped his arms and allowed her to pass. The women seeing this made a rush and soon twenty-five of them were in the dispensary shouting : " Bravo ! Bravo !" Space will not allow an account of these struggles, of the dangers that surrounded Mary Bird's path, of the opposition and bigotry, and of the daily toil to open doors fast barred by a fanatical people. Mary Bird often worked nineteen hours a day, visiting, teaching, and healing the sick. No wonder she was known everywhere as *Khanum Maryam*, or the Lady Mary. But love won in the end, and iron-barred doors opened to the love, sacrifice, and prayers of those who worked by the invincible power of God.

When the late Lord Curzon visited Persia he witnessed the struggle of the missionaries to gain a foothold in Isfahan and he wrote :—

It is against the impregnable rock-wall of Islam, as a system embracing every sphere, and duty, and act of life, that the waves of missionary effort beat and buffet in vain. Marvellously adapted alike to the climate, character, and occupations of those countries upon which it has laid its adamant grip, Islam holds its votary in complete thrall from the cradle to the grave. To him, it is not only religion, it is government, philosophy, and science as well. The Mohammedan conception is not so much that of a state church as, if the phrase may be permitted, of a church state. The undergirders with which society itself is warped round are not of civil, but of ecclesiastical, fabrication ; and wrapped in this superb, if paralysing, creed, the Mussulman lives in contented surrender of all volition, deems it his highest duty to worship God and to compel, or, where impossible, to despise those who do not worship Him in the spirit, and then dies in sure and certain hope of paradise. So long as this all-compelling, all-absorbing code of life holds an eastern people in its embrace, determining every duty and regulating every act of existence, and finally meeting out an assured salvation, missionary treasure and missionary self-denial will largely be spent in vain.<sup>1</sup>

The impossible happened. Land was ultimately bought in

<sup>1</sup> *Persia* (vol. I., p. 509).

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Isfahan and a hospital erected. Then schools were started, and all the work that had had to be conducted from the Armenian quarter of Julfa was transferred to Isfahan, right into the midst of the Moslem quarter. It was said at that time that when Christians were first allowed to enter Isfahan they might only do so on dry days and not by any chance when it was raining, for "a dry dog is bad enough, but a wet dog who can stand?" As missionaries passed through the streets they were hailed as the dogs that guard the doors of hell.

It is a far cry from the day when Henry Martyn first preached Christ in Shiraz to the beginnings of direct Moslem work in Isfahan proper. Looking back one can see how much was accomplished but at what a cost! The foundations had been securely laid and the C.M.S. in Persia entered upon a new phase of activity. Can Christ save Persia? In the darkest days no missionary ever doubted it, and the answer has always come ringing back from the arena itself: "Yes, He saves—we are proving it daily."

## CHAPTER IV

### HOW THE CHURCH GROWS

**P**ERSIA from a missionary point of view is divided to-day into two spheres of influence. The northern half is occupied by the American Presbyterians and the southern half by the C.M.S. North-west Persia was first entered by American missionaries ninety years ago, and it is only lack of space which prevents my telling of the splendid work accomplished. From Urumia and Tabriz through Tehran, Hamadan, and Kermanshah there is a chain of mission stations, and this fine American Mission is engaged in definite Moslem evangelization through hospitals, schools, and other agencies. In two schools alone there are over 1000 pupils. It is the policy of the Americans to strengthen their forces in the main stations occupied, to equip more efficiently the hospitals, and to extend the educational work. These mission stations run close to the borders of Afghanistan, and it is part of the objective of the missionaries to occupy that country when the way opens. Already missionary doctors have made periodical visits into Afghanistan. In 1924 Herat was visited and although evangelistic work was strictly forbidden, yet many patients were treated, and Afghans in that area came in contact for the first time in their lives with Christian missionaries.

South Persia is commonly known as a C.M.S. sphere. These boundaries were fixed at a conference held in 1895. There is no overlapping of missionary work in Persia, but between the north and the south there is a growing spirit of co-operation which makes for unity of aim and purpose throughout the land. I shall come back later to the subject of this co-operation, and will confine this chapter to the C.M.S. area.

The C.M.S. has undertaken the evangelization of half Persia, an area about one and a half times the size of France, with a population of five or six million people. In this sphere

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there are a number of important towns and hundreds of villages. Isfahan with environs has about 190,000 people ; Shiraz 40,000 ; Kerman 50,000 ; Yezd 30,000 ; and Bushire 30,000.

If you will turn to the map of Persia (p. viii) you will at once see the strategic importance of the centres occupied by the C.M.S. Isfahan is the old capital of the country and famous the world over for its mosques. Their domes of turquoise blue and their slender minarets glisten in the sun, a permanent memorial to the faith of Islam. The town has been long known as the *Markaz-i-Mazhab*, or the centre of religion. It has been the cultural and religious centre of Persia for many years and was, as we have seen, closed to the Gospel. To-day Isfahan is linked with all the other large towns of the country by motor roads, and an aeroplane mail service is flying weekly from the Gulf to Isfahan and on to the Caspian. We must leave history behind now and look at what is actually happening to-day.

When I first reached Isfahan it was night time and the car in which we travelled was trying to make speed over a rough and bumpy road ; a sand storm was blowing and we were covered in sand and dirt. At the outskirts of the town the pastor, a converted Moslem, met us with the news that a missionary 300 miles away was seriously ill. His first request to me was to go straight to the church to join the congregation in prayer for healing. We had just concluded a 700 mile journey from Baghdad and what we felt most to need was a bath, but I shall always be thankful that my first impression of the Church in Persia was that of a people on their knees in definite and earnest prayer for a sick person. The pastor led the intercessions and there was an atmosphere of faith and love that made prayer easy. There was a complete absence of excitement, and everything was quiet and reverent. There were periods for silent prayer and then one and another rose and prayed that this sister might be healed.

As I knelt there I contrasted the early days of struggle and opposition when persecution followed bitterly the steps of a man who sought Christ. The sand storm and the rough road

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over which I had travelled seemed to typify those days, but I had come out of the storm into the calm of God's presence among a praying people, and this, too, was typical of the changes in Isfahan. Kneeling round me were many who had once been Moslems. Some of the older ones had passed through great trials. All had had to brave the anger of friends and families, and here they were gathered in prayer. I think that day the call of God for advance in Persia reached me in a new way. I rose from my knees to find myself surrounded by a devoted band of workers, all waiting to give me the warmest of welcomes to their church. On this day my work in Persia proper began. The next day a telegram came to the Bishop, saying that the missionary's temperature was normal. "How wonderful," I said to the pastor. "Not at all," was the reply, "we expected it." Here was the secret of victory in Persia. Mountains had been removed, barriers broken down, highways for the Gospel opened up, and men and women brought out of darkness into the glorious light and liberty of the Gospel through prayer. This Mission has advanced literally upon its knees.

I went from the church to the vestry and there I was shown the baptismal register. Here were over three hundred names of men and women, all once Moslems, and they had all made a public confession of Christ in baptism. The stories of these three hundred would fill volumes. The struggles and the search for God, the message of Christ brought to them, the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, the deep conviction of sin and the joyous shout of triumph as the light broke into their hearts and as in simple faith they accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour. As the Church down the centuries has grown it has never been by an easy imitation of a past age, but in an ever-expanding experience of the Gospel. As years have rolled on we have come to see more clearly the greatness of our message in its application to individuals and races, in its influence upon social conditions and industry, but behind all lies what the Apostle describes as "the everlasting Gospel"—the message of salvation through Christ and His redemption of the world through the Cross.



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I shall try to show the Gospel in action along different lines, but in doing so let me emphasize again that any success the Mission has seen in Persia has been due to an insistence upon personal conversion. Social service has grown up, but it has been out of the deep love of God in the hearts of those who have themselves personally experienced Christ in their own lives.

Another early impression of Persia was the way in which race differences were being healed through the Gospel. Among the converts were mullahs, religious leaders, highwaymen, merchants, and others, all once Moslems, and side by side with them, working under the same banner and knit together by new ties of faith and love, were Armenians, Parsis, and Jews, all having found Christ and all seeking to extend His Kingdom among their own people. Here, too, men and women met in a common worship and service. The barriers of sex inequalities set up by Islam had gone and the Church was proving that the true emancipation of women lies in the Gospel. Women took part in services, led in prayer in the meetings, and sat on the parochial councils freed at last from the restrictions of the harem and from Moslem social disabilities.

In the days that followed my arrival in Isfahan I saw the work in its manifold activities and these I will try to describe as illustrations of the Gospel in action. The struggles of Mary Bird and others in opening medical work turned my thoughts first to the hospitals.

The C.M.S. has four hospitals in Persia, at Isfahan, Kerman, Shiraz, and Yezd. I say four though they are really eight because at each centre there are two, one for men and one for women.

In Isfahan there is a large compound, the property of the Society. In it is a men's hospital with 110 beds and a women's hospital with 100 beds. These buildings are spacious and well planned, with wide verandas running round them, and patients come from miles around for treatment. A visit to a medical mission station at once raises many questions. What is the real objective of a hospital as a missionary agency?

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To say that it is simply to enable us to preach to people who otherwise would not come is to take a poor view of the content of the Gospel. Our Lord spent a very large proportion of His time in healing the sick. This I am sure was not done simply to attract people to Him, nor was it with a view to making opportunities for preaching, nor was it only as a demonstration of divine power. Our Lord healed the sick because the care of the body was an essential part of the Gospel, not merely a useful adjunct to it. When He said: "The blind receive their sight, the sick are healed and the lame walk," He was defining the Gospel. For this reason every act of healing by our Lord was an act of love. It was the Gospel brought to bear upon the problem of suffering and pain, and our Lord in His attitude to sickness and disease was revealing the Father's will. He made it clear that sickness does not come from God because He fought against it as an enemy all His life. This principle lies at the basis of all medical missionary work. Every act of healing is bringing Christ's love and sympathy to bear upon some suffering soul. The C.M.S. has planted medical missions in many parts of the world because they are regarded as an essential part of the Christian message, and the motive has ever been a God-given compassion such as was in the heart of Christ.

To return to Isfahan. Here in this Moslem quarter Christian missionaries by their acts of healing lift people out of a dead fatalism, they present to a selfish secularism the sacrificial service which seeks only to give and not to receive. The Gospel is thus seen as a message for men in their present needs, as a power that joins heart to heart in sympathy in the face of a common suffering, and as a call to live for others and not for self. Alongside of this there always comes, as in our Lord's own day, the preaching of the message. Repentance, forgiveness, and love are shown to be the road to God. In Isfahan Persians are being trained as doctors, girls are being initiated into the art of nursing, and this immense work is carried on with a very small European staff because the large majority of the staff are people of the country. The staff meet for prayer each morning, and then while the doctors are

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busy with their patients services begin in wards and among out-patients. A little book shop at the entrance to the compound attracts to it young Moslems who, having seen a little of the meaning of the Gospel, want to know more. It is interesting to note that in every hospital of the C.M.S. in Persia recently there have been definite conversions and baptisms. Before every operation the doctor and his assistants pray with or for the patient, and the whole work is permeated with the spirit of Christ.

Here is the Gospel in action, and because this medical work is kept in the forefront as a part of the message Persians are awakening to a new sense of the value of the Christian faith. When I called upon the Governor of Isfahan he spoke in terms of high praise of the doctors and all they meant to the town. "When you go back to England," he said, "will you thank the people for the help they have brought to us." He was speaking not as an individual only but as the representative of the greatest Moslem stronghold in Persia. What a contrast it was to the day when Mary Bird found her dispensary barred and bolted and Moslem mullahs standing outside forbidding people to go near a Christian doctor ! Ignorance, superstition, and fear have disappeared as the light has broken upon lives darkened by suffering, and men have seen God anew in the heroic service of a band of missionaries, who refused to acknowledge defeat and by love won their way through to a great triumph.

St. James was a very practical Christian and much in his epistle has a direct bearing upon missionary problems in Persia to-day. When he said : "If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body ; what doth it profit ?" he was warning the Church against an interpretation of the Gospel that limited its scope to preaching and saw no responsibility for the social conditions of his day. He emphasized, and rightly, the fruitlessness of preaching to hungry people without some effort to feed them.

We have seen how the turning point in the C.M.S. decision

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to occupy Persia was the baptism of a group of converts and the relief of suffering in a time of great famine. Dr. Bruce had exemplified two great principles, and he was following in the steps of St. James in his care for the starving multitude.

In 1916 another famine occurred in Persia. There was much suffering and the little Church took its share in relief work, but out of it all there came one permanent and new activity. A woman missionary started needlework for women to enable them to earn money while they were suffering from famine prices. The scheme was to reintroduce a distinctly Persian art. The patterns are drawn from the old tiles in the mosques and palaces and are Persian in design. The women soon showed great aptitude and turned out most beautiful work. There have always been more applicants for this home of industry than the place could accommodate. Some women work on the premises and others now take work to their homes and thus in their spare time earn money. They are paid on a piecework basis and the industry has found patrons throughout Persia and also in England and America. It has developed into a commercial concern of considerable importance. It pays its way and any profits made go back into the work and are used for further extensions. When I visited this institution I found it packed with women and girls. It was during the mid-morning break and they were all drinking tea and chatting ; the doors of the house open on to a large and beautiful garden, and there was an atmosphere of peace about the place that must have formed a striking contrast to the homes from which many of the women came. Faces speak volumes, and some of these women's faces spoke of suffering and care, of anxiety and sorrow. But here in the garden care was forgotten for a time, and these poor creatures smiled happily as they relaxed to the sense of love and affection that surrounded them.

With this practical work there is also combined a strong evangelistic message. Reading classes are held for girls and Bible classes for the women. Meetings are held regularly at which simple gospel addresses are given. These in turn have

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led to classes for candidates for baptism. About eighty women are in touch with the industry and sixteen of them have already been baptized. Plans have just been completed for new premises. Land has been bought and a larger home of industry is being erected. Further schemes of development are on foot. Another class of women will be attracted to the home when dress-making can be made a branch of the work. Here again is the Gospel finding expression in practical service and leading these women back to Christ Himself, the one source of all the sympathy and love here expressed.

Are schools necessary as a branch of missionary work? It seems almost fatuous to ask the question, yet it is being asked by many in England who support missions. Why not stick to preaching the Gospel? I will try to answer this from what I saw of the educational work in Persia. The C.M.S. has a large college for boys in Isfahan, with hostels for boarders and a curriculum which takes the boys to the end of their secondary course. There is also a flourishing college for girls with a boarding department, and in addition to these there is a small primary school, chiefly for Christian boys. In the Stuart Memorial College there are about 130 boys, including forty boarders. The Girls' College has about 100 pupils and the primary school twenty-five boys.

To understand the significance of this work it must be viewed in relation to the young and growing Church. Pioneer evangelism brings converts and often converts with little or no education. To leave young Christians to find their education through Moslem institutions is to ask for disaster. The teaching opportunities of Sunday are not enough when the whole influence throughout the week is Moslem, and no society can build up a strong Church which leaves its converts either illiterate or to be educated by non-Christians and surrounded by influences which are often anti-Christian. It is for this reason that there ought to be a boys' and a girls' school at every mission centre.

Again it should be remembered that Christianity in a Moslem area is largely judged by its power to build up and develop character. Much in the religious teaching in Moslem

**schools is impure and the Shariat or Moslem law, which forms the basis of Moslem teaching, is filled with sex questions which pollute the minds of the young and ruin character just at the critical stage in a child's life.**

Moslems in Persia bear striking testimony to the character produced in mission schools. They prefer to send their boys to the missionaries, although they know they will come under Christian influence, because they are convinced now that a mission school can keep a boy straight where Islam fails.

Now come with me to the Stuart Memorial College. It is speech day. We walk along a dusty road, passing acres of opium-poppy fields on the way, and reach finally a large and imposing compound. A fine avenue leads to the main block of buildings. Boy scouts are everywhere *en route* to guide people and there is a steady stream of visitors from the town to the College. The grounds are decorated with bunting and flags, a Persian band is playing, and in the grounds a very large marquee has been erected for the ceremony. I arrived in good time and had an opportunity of studying the crowd. About a thousand people were present. Here was the governor of the town waiting to distribute the prizes. The Director of Education had come also to show his appreciation of the work. The British consul was standing near by, and a short distance away were some princes and a group of notables, the leaders of life in Isfahan. There were Moslems, Jews, and Christians all intermingled, all eager to support a work the value of which they had proved. Speech day was the one time in the year when in a great demonstration the men of Persia could show what they thought of Christian education, and the popularity of this College was immense. No other institution in South Persia has the same hold upon the people. I would like to rub the magic ring and transplant you into the oil fields of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Here you would find a growing colony of old boys from the College. Their reliability and worth are recognized by the heads of the Company, but follow them to their homes and you would see them gathering together for services, witnessing to the Gospel, and living as ambassadors for Christ. The oil fields employ

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some 30,000 men, and there in the midst of this great commercial enterprise is a body of young, keen Christian men, who, surrounded by temptation and evil, keep the banner of the Cross flying. Is it worth it? Yes, a thousand times yes. It is worth it educationally, morally, and spiritually.

If we carry this idea farther we shall see these boys returning for their holidays to distant homes, strong Moslem centres, carrying with them a new conception of Christianity, and in many cases carrying too the message of the Gospel.

Visit the boys on the playing field and again you have another picture. Here are Moslems, Jews, and Christians all playing football together and playing the game. Think of the old days when a Moslem would not shake hands with a Christian. Think of the old hatreds between race and race and then look again at this sight—these boys united in a game that breaks down race prejudice and unites them as nothing else can.

Come now with me into the school. Bible lessons are being given. The Gospel is taught in its simplicity and fulness. Boys are growing up in these days of nationalism and change to find the anchor of their lives in Christ. This year there have been baptisms from among both Moslem and Jewish pupils, and evangelism through education is increasingly a power for the building up of the Church.

One more picture. It is holiday time. A young English master has gathered round him a group of earnest Christian boys. They are going out into the villages to preach and to witness. They enter a Moslem village and soon they are busy selling Scriptures, tracts, and books, and groups of people gather round, eager to listen to the message. The old fanaticism has gone. A new willingness to listen to the Gospel has taken its place and the seed is sown in faith. The word of God is left in that village and on the little band goes, spreading the Good News. This is the boys' well-earned holiday and they give it gladly for the sake of the Gospel.

While the girls' educational work in some ways may be more restricted, yet as an influence for good it would be difficult to over estimate its importance. The emancipation of women

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in Persia is not nearly as advanced as it is in Turkey or Egypt. Old customs die hard and so far it has only been a few of the higher classes who have braved criticism and discarded the veil. Child marriages are still common, and this custom hitherto has prevented the girls from completing their education. Polygamy is decreasing because economic conditions make it too expensive for any except the wealthy to marry more than one wife.

The mullahs have stoutly resisted the education of women and in fact every effort towards feminist reforms. When C.M.S. missionaries began girls' education they were the pioneers of it in South Persia. They led the way at a time when few parents would spend money on school fees for their daughters. To-day this attitude has so completely changed that throughout the country there is a general demand for girls' schools.

The C.M.S. Girls' College at Isfahan not only has its ordinary system of education but one missionary attached to the institution is developing normal training work. She is in touch with all the other schools of the Society in Persia and carries on by correspondence a training class for teachers. One of the biggest problems is to find adequately trained women teachers, and this training, though still in its early stages, is important and is making for greater efficiency in the schools. Much of what I have said about boys' education applies to that of girls also. Bible instruction is given and the whole atmosphere of the college is Christian. While the Christian girls cannot go from place to place publicly spreading the Good News as the boys do, they are able to visit in the homes and in a quiet way to exercise a great influence.

One other branch of work should be mentioned in this connexion. It is the beginnings of Sunday-school work. In Isfahan one missionary and his wife have taken this up and have successfully carried on classes Sunday by Sunday. Some of the Persian women have come forward as teachers, and there is hope here for the future as this work becomes a recognized branch of church life.

While on one of my journeys I travelled beside a broad



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river. As we motored on across the plain I noticed that the river had disappeared and I asked where it had gone. I was told that it was swallowed up in the sandy wastes. All that could be seen at the end of it was a marshy swamp. The land around was uncultivated and the water lost. Much of the new life of Persia to-day is like that river ; it ends in the sands of materialism. It ceases to flow when in contact with the wilderness. In this chapter we have seen the new channels of life being dug through education, hospitals, evangelism, and social service. We see the river of life flowing and in contact with the desert ; it is not swallowed up, but it conquers the desert. The waste places are being repaired through the message of the Gospel, and although the forces of Christianity are small in comparison with the population as a whole, yet their influence is out of all proportion to their numerical strength. The day for which Martyn prayed has come. The task, even in this more encouraging phase, is only beginning, and it is to the future we must look for still greater advance until Persia is won for Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER V

### THE COMING OF THE KING

**I** SAT one Sunday morning in the little church in Kerman. The faces of the men and women converts interested me. Some were educated young men of position who had turned from Islam to Christianity, others were poor carpet weavers, young women with bright smiling faces but crippled bodies. The service was conducted in Persian and was strange to me. The music, too, was Persian and thoroughly bewildered me because I could not discern any tune in it. The people, however, were supremely happy and sang most heartily. I began to take stock of this unique gathering until my eyes rested on the evangelist who was conducting the service. He was tall and thin, ascetic in type, with sharp features and keen piercing eyes. Who was he, I wondered? There was something about him that made me determined to find out his history. He led the worship with a quiet dignity that seemed to express itself all through his personality, and as soon as the service was over I asked the Bishop who he was. "He belongs to the *Ahl-i-Haqq*, or the People of the Truth," was the reply. I had read of this interesting but little-known sect, and here for the first time I met a convert from it.

In the sixteenth century A.D. there appeared in Persia a Kurd known as Peer Sahak, who founded a new sect under the title of "*Ahl-i-Haqq*." Their faith is a curious mixture of Christianity and Islam, and although they have never been a powerful body they have maintained their identity down to to-day. Ali figures prominently in their creed, which is largely coloured by the Shiah sect of Islam. There are Jewish elements in this religion too, but the secrets of the faith are carefully guarded. One thought, however, looms large in their life, the expectation of a coming King.

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They sing this song in daily hope of the deliverer :—

To be looking for the coming of the King  
He is the true slave who is looking for the King  
Clean in action, clean in thought, clean in gaze  
Unmovable from the path of truth and duty.  
O dear friends, the King is coming ;  
Good news, O good news, the King is coming  
Let hands be engaged in service, but eyes look forward in expectation.

As one reads these prophetic words of a people who have lived on for centuries waiting for the King, one's mind goes back to a great missionary gathering where the hymn is sung :—

Thou art coming, O my Saviour,  
Thou art coming, O my King.

Kerman, 400 miles from Isfahan, and district is the home of these " People of the Truth." It is also after Isfahan the most important centre of C.M.S. work in Persia. It is a large and flourishing town with a trade route to India and many links with the outside world, and is well-known as one of the centres of the carpet weaving industry. Its people are a vigorous race with characteristics peculiar to Kerman. They are known throughout Persia for their independence and initiative.

The C.M.S. hospital there is the finest mission hospital I have ever seen. The compound is about eight acres in size and the most modern types of building have been erected. What I have said of the Isfahan Hospital applies equally to Kerman. On its medical side it is first class, and evangelism is ever to the fore. I went one day from this fine building down through the long bazaars to see an extension of medical work that appealed particularly to me. In the midst of a poor part of the town I found an English woman missionary at work. She was living a community life with her Persian helpers, living on Persian food, and completely identifying herself with their life. What was her field of work ?

Let us go into one of the weaving sheds run by Persians for carpet making. Here down below the level of the ground in a dark and stuffy room were fixed large looms. They were made from beams of wood fixed upright in the ground, and

around them was an immense frame with a roller at the top. A plank of wood ran from one end of the frame to the other, and on it were sitting women and children, weaving carpets for wealthy European homes. The children are indentured by their parents for a period of five years. When the bargain is struck the parents receive a sum of money in advance and the balance is paid when the five years are completed. The child may be eight or nine years of age when she begins her work. To all intents and purposes she is a slave of her employer, and she sits on this plank of wood all day with her legs tucked under her, pulling the strands of wool through the string, and when sunset comes she is so stiff and cramped that she has to be lifted down. The next day is the same, and so on through the year. All the time when she ought to be out of doors playing she is buried in this dark room. She is still growing and her limbs have not reached maturity, and the constant sitting in this one position cripples and stunts her growth. Gradually she becomes deformed and ceases to grow. Then there comes a day when she is taken from the sheds, decked out in new clothes, and married. She was not consulted when she began to weave carpets, and she is not consulted now as to her choice of a husband. He is selected for her and she is simply informed that she is to be married. When the day comes for this poor crippled girl to become a mother she must either face death or find expert medical skill.

Here lies the work of this missionary and her devoted band of helpers. They are at the beck and call of any woman in need day or night, and by their ministrations they are saving life and preventing terrible suffering. Kerman is not considered a pleasant place in the dark hours of night, and certain English people protested to the Bishop that it was unsafe for an English woman to live in the midst of the native quarter of the town and so far from help if any trouble arose. The Bishop consulted some Persians of note about the protest and was given this answer: "When those Englishmen you refer to wish to visit that quarter of Kerman they do so with an armed guard, but if they would dispense with their guard and take as their only escort this missionary they would be

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far safer because she is the most beloved person in the city. Her labour of love carries its own reward in the affection the people show her." In addition to this midwifery treatment there are also classes for mothers on hygiene and the care of children. All this work is prompted by the spirit of Christ Who healed the lepers and cared for the sick. No wonder then that many of these mothers who owe their lives to this woman worker want to know the secret of it all. They are told the secret in the weekly gospel meetings, and while I was there I met some of those crippled women, deformed in body but radiant in soul. They had found the secret. Christ had met them and they had confessed Him in baptism.

The need of such work is now attracting the attention of the Persian Press. As an illustration of this I give the following free translation of an article that appeared in a Persian paper in Kerman :—

### THE KERMAN CARPETS AND THE CUTTING OFF OF THE OFFSPRING OF KERMAN

From the Kerman province in a single year several millions of *temans*' (dollars) worth of carpets are exported, and gold and silver flows in Persia. But there is one great mistake. Ninety-five per cent of these exports, which are the result of the toil of thousands of Persian women, are only for the benefit of foreign companies. A miserable wage of one or two *krans* (5*d.*) per day is paid to the workers. These same beautiful carpets, which are the ornaments of the palaces of the wealthy people of the world, sentence to extinction one important province of Persia.

The physical strain involved makes these weavers weak and wretched, and they seek solace in the smoking of opium. It is not possible for you to meet in Kerman one weaver, man or woman, who has the appearance of a human being. The majority of the men and women are sallow, abject hunchbacks, with deformed legs.

The tragedy of this disastrous situation becomes apparent chiefly among the girls. There are about 3000 girls and women working as weavers in Kerman, and more than that number are employed in the surrounding villages. These girls work for nine hours a day in winter, and eleven hours in summer. For lunch they eat a bit of dry native bread, sitting with their backs to the looms. In order to earn more money they do not leave the weaving shed at the lunch hour. But with all their efforts the

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daily wage never exceeds one kran per day, and generally wages run from ten to thirty shahis a day.

The usual custom prevailing in Persia is for mothers to contract out or sell their daughters, when six or seven years of age, for four or five years' pledged service. For five years' work the total wages will be about £10 or £12. About £4 is paid in advance by the factory to the mother, and the balance in instalments. (Thus the girls themselves receive no wages whatsoever for five years.) The result of apprenticing young girls in this way is to condemn them to a tragic death.

These girls, while working as weavers, are married at an early age. When they are confined, seventy-five per cent of them require an operation. Kerman lacks hospitals, maternity homes, and doctors, and naturally many of the girls die in childbirth. Those who go to the Christian missionary nurses at the hospital often die because of their deformed bodies. Owing to weakness and exhaustion they cannot stand the strain of an operation. In the whole of Kerman the only reliable hospital is the mission hospital and the only good doctor is Dr. Dodson (C.M.S.).

The cause of deformity is that these girls are compelled to sit on a bare, narrow plank of wood without a back to it. The body thus grows in a deformed shape, making natural childbirth impossible.

The Christian missionary nurses, who are the only helpers of these poor women, through their compassion and sympathy, have appealed to the bishops and the head-quarters of the Church Missionary Society in London for further help for these unfortunate girls.

A commission is now sitting, under the presidency of the Governor of Kerman, which includes the Director of Education, the Chief of the Police, and other leading people. A scheme for reform is being drawn up, dealing with hygiene, hours of work, wages, food, and recreation for the workers. It is hoped that the work of this commission will attract the attention of the Shah, and that the Kerman proposals will become an Act of Parliament.

It is interesting to note that the writer of this article admits freely that the only help being given to these women comes from "the Christian women" of the C.M.S., and that it is their compassion and sympathy which lies behind their service.

I wish I were able to describe in detail the boys' school in Kerman, now entering upon a new phase of usefulness in a large and handsome building, and the girls' school where the staff live together as one family, the missionary sharing the

same food as her Persian teachers and living their life, but space will not allow.

I will therefore take you with me on another journey, this time across a great plain from Kerman to the town of X—. Here I was the guest of a young Persian, the solitary witness for Christ in the midst of a Moslem population of about 10,000. Some years ago a colporteur of the Bible Society passed through this town selling Scriptures. There was not a single Christian in the place, the mullahs had great influence over the people and the town itself was a long way from other centres, therefore isolated from the outside life of the world. The work of these faithful sellers of the Scriptures is often discouraging and in a fanatical Moslem town it is not easy to find those who are interested in the Christian Scriptures. But on this occasion the man, tired after a long journey and carrying his pack with copies of the Scriptures in it, was stopped by a young man who eagerly bought a copy of the New Testament. From his inquiries it was obvious that the man was a seeker after God. The colporteur opened the New Testament and read from the first epistle of St. John. This led to an invitation from the young Persian to visit his home. Long into the night these two men talked, and when the colporteur went on his way he put this young man in touch with a C.M.S. missionary about a hundred miles away.

The next stage in the story was some months later. Bishop Linton was passing through this town in his car when he was stopped by this man who said: "Will you stay at my house to-night? I am a Christian." The Bishop readily consented and found that he had made real progress in the study of the Scriptures. He was anxious to be prepared for baptism and the Bishop arranged for him to go to another town to be taught. Here after a month he was baptized. When he returned home he soon found something of the cost of the step he had taken. His mother said that as he had renounced his faith he was unclean, and she refused to eat with him and left the home. The family tried every possible means of shaking the man's faith but he held on boldly, witnessing to his new joy in Christ. After a time it was thought wise by

the Mission to give him training as a catechist, and he went to Isfahan and studied there for about two years. During this period he developed in a remarkable way. He knew that if he completed his training he would probably become a paid catechist of the Mission, but he was thinking for himself. One day he said: "I must prove first of all whether it is possible for a convert to live in his own town where he is known and where he is the only Christian in the place, and I must also prove whether I can, in my own town as a Christian, earn my own living." He did not want people to say that he was receiving money to preach the Gospel, and he felt that if he could pay his own way his witness would be more powerful than if he were a paid agent of the C.M.S. About this time a letter reached him from his brother inviting him to return and promising that the family would not interfere with his religion. This seemed the opening for which he had been praying so he set out once more for his home. He re-opened his shop and at once commenced to witness wherever opportunity offered itself. Solitarily and alone he lived as a Christian.

The next phase was this year (1928), when the Bishop and I decided to spend a night with this man on our way to Isfahan. We arrived about sunset and were taken to the house. We had hardly sat down before some men began to drop in. One by one they came until six of them were present. Then the young Christian introduced them: one was a hat maker, others were shopkeepers, and one was his own brother. These men, he said, are all Christians and they want to confess their faith in baptism. The Bishop, who is very careful whom he baptizes, began to examine them, and for the next two hours the conversation went on. Each man separately spoke of his desire to be baptized until in the end the Bishop, turning to me, said: "These men are ready for baptism: who can forbid water?" Then followed a service I shall long remember. We stood in this simple Persian home around a table; an oil lamp was placed in the middle of it and a bowl of water was brought in. The baptismal service commenced, and as the men gave their answers one by one there was no



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**mistaking the real joy they had found in Christ. That night a church was founded which reminded one of St. Paul's message "to the church that is in thy house." The young man now had companions in the Faith. He was set aside in a special service a little later as a lay reader.**

**Late that night I had the chance of a talk with this man and I asked him what it was that led him to Christ. His answer was that, before he came in touch with missionaries or read the Bible, he had been convicted of sin. For a time he was miserable and sought peace of conscience through the prescribed rules of Islam. The more he struggled the more miserable he became. He sought God in prayer and God sent a Bible Society colporteur with the Scriptures. There he read of forgiveness through Christ and after a long quest he accepted Christ as his Saviour and stepped into a joy and peace hitherto unknown.**

**This man is typical of many in Persia to-day. The young men are disillusioned and dissatisfied with Islam. Many are still outwardly Moslems but at heart they have little use for their old faith. The nationalism of the day is creating a great change in the mentality and outlook of the people. Some openly confess themselves agnostics and are seeking for a new way of life that is material and purely secular. Others are adopting Bahaism as a religion of freedom and brotherhood, and some are pursuing the quest further and are finding in Christ the goal of a long search and a life that is life indeed. The country is passing through a period of transition and never before have there been such openings for the Gospel.**

**What happened in that town is an indication of a widespread interest in Christianity. On Christmas Day, 1925, a special service was arranged for Moslems in the church at Isfahan. St Luke's Church normally holds 500 worshippers seated in Persian fashion on the ground. That afternoon the church was packed to overflowing half an hour before the service began. At least 700 people, most of them belonging to the educated class, were present. An overflow service in the hospital waiting room was hurriedly planned, and many even then were unable to obtain admission. Other services**

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of a similar nature have been held since and every mission station reports inquirers and converts. The Persian Christians say that there are hundreds, if not thousands, scattered throughout the country, deeply interested and reading the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts of these people, producing a divine discontent and leading many to seek peace in and through the Gospel of Christ.

Bishop Linton writing to the C.M.S. in 1926 spoke of these movements as a "cloud the size of a man's hand," and said: "I hear the sound of abundance of rain. A flood of water on the earth can do one of two things. If it is prepared for it can be conserved and used to bring forth an abundant harvest. But if it is not prepared for it can come down, a rushing torrent, uprooting everything before it, destroying gardens, and leaving destruction in its path. Which is it to be in this Moslem land? We cannot prevent the flood, but we can prepare for it and use it when it comes."

"Harvest is here upon us," say the missionaries; how has it come about? I go back to that lonely missionary Henry Martyn and his year in Shiraz translating the Scriptures. There was the beginning. Now about 20,000 copies of the Bible are sold in Persia annually and it has been proved time and again that the thing that led men to inquire about our Faith was their reading of the Bible. It is estimated that there is a copy of the Scriptures in every educated home in Isfahan, and what is more important is the fact that Moslems all over Persia are reading the Bible for themselves. Those men coming forward for baptism have been steeped all their lives in the Koran. Many of them have led prayers in the mosques and have been teachers of the Koran. They have turned away from the broken cisterns and have found satisfaction in the fountain of Living Water.

I go back to those "People of the Truth" and their search for God. I hear them again saying: "O dear friends, the King is coming," and I pick up the Christian refrain:—

Thou art coming, O my Saviour,  
Thou art coming, O my King.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN MARTYN'S STEPS

**I**T was while on my way to Shiraz that I first came across the great tribes on trek. I passed their long line of mules, horses, camels, sheep, and goats, stretching for miles across the plain. It was early May, and the tribes who had been down towards the Gulf for the winter months had begun to move to higher altitudes in search of grass. As the hot sun burnt up the grass so the long procession moved forward and upward seeking new pastures, for grass is life to the flocks and herds. As summer comes this trek continues up the mountains until first they reach 5000 feet, then 6000 feet, and on still upward over 10,000 feet above sea level. The line of march is much the same as it has been for thousands of years, and the tribes push their way through mountain torrents and over snow-clad heights until they reach a high plateau where there is grass all through the hot season. Men, women, and children have to be transported twice every year in this great quest for grass. It is arduous and dangerous, but whatever the physical condition of the people they must move and keep moving until they have reached their summer quarters. The law of self-preservation makes these people move upward or perish. They are a kindly and chivalrous race; brigands and highwaymen among them—warriors all, fiercely independent and jealous of any encroachment upon their rights. Yet when you go among them they are just as human as you or me. They have their sorrows and pains, their difficulties and trials, and never a doctor among them.

When they passed near Shiraz the sick ones were sent to the hospitals. Some came trudging over the hills through the Koran Gate on a Monday morning when I was there. It was a free dispensary day and the halt, the maimed, the sick, and the suffering blocked the narrow lane leading to the hospital :

among them were some tribespeople, and they all clamoured and shouted to be admitted. To keep order in such circumstances is not easy. The hospital gate was opened and men were admitted to one room, women to another, until both places were crammed to suffocation, and still the patients came. A pathetic throng, just such an one as must have crowded round our Lord on great days when the Evangelist said : " And he healed them all." Not one was ever turned away by the Great Physician, and following His example two doctors, a man and a woman, strove all that morning to attend to this suffering crowd. With difficulty I squeezed through the door and tried to get into the waiting room, but it was so packed there was not room for me to put a foot down. At the door stood a breathless missionary nurse in an atmosphere that baffles description, looking over the cases, passing them on to the doctor, and trying to speak words of comfort to all. The people were vociferously demanding to see the doctor. It looked like pandemonium, but it was just an ordinary day in some missionaries' lives. In the end order was restored, the patients were all attended to, the serious cases sent into hospital to await an operation, others with their bottles of medicine began to make their way back home again.

The tribespeople, who seldom receive much kindness, have for years come to the C.M.S. Shiraz Hospital. They have told tales of suffering while on trek, of lives lost for want of medical skill, and wished that they could pick up the whole hospital and make it trek too ! They are all strong Moslems but they have found something in Shiraz unique in their experience, a Christian doctor who speaks words of comfort and gives them skilled advice.

One day the chief of the tribe waited on the doctor. He and his retinue rode in on beautiful ponies, and with all the grace and dignity of those born to rule they made their petition : " Will you send us a doctor to travel with us, to live our rough life, and to care for our sick ones ? " They placed no obstacle in the way of religious teaching, they offered to pay themselves as much as they could afford towards the cost. These strong men who were accustomed to command and to order, whose

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word was law throughout the tribe, had come as suppliants to the missionary. "Come over and help us," they said, "we need you."

The doctor could not leave Shiraz. He was more than occupied with the work he had undertaken. Very reluctantly he had to say "No." One afternoon I sat in this doctor's house and he told me about these tribes and their request, and we began to discuss together what it would mean to answer this call. It was clear that the venture involved the setting up of a travelling mobile hospital, similar to the field ambulances of war days. Tent equipment would be needed, also drugs and stores and one doctor, a Persian assistant, a nurse, and probably two servants. Could it be done? "No," was the emphatic answer, "not with the existing staff and grants. Send us the workers and the money and we will go ahead."

On my way from Shiraz back to Isfahan, I again saw these tribal folk, but I saw them with different eyes. In a vision I could see one part of the procession forming a medical unit, the missionaries on the long slow journeys moving among the people talking to them of the Saviour Who loved them. I saw, too, the twinkling lights of the camp at night, the sick ones crowding round a little tent for medicine, and again I saw these same chiefs sitting on the ground, the stars overhead and the stillness of night around them. In their midst sat the doctor reasoning with them of the Faith he had found and of what it would mean to them. I woke up out of my reverie. It was only the play of imagination you say. Was it? Or was it a vision in the night of what God is calling us to do? Whether it remains imagination or actual fact depends, to some extent, upon those who read these words.

I want now to take you back again to Shiraz. A young ordained missionary meets me and we walk together through the town. He unburdens his soul. Here he is sent out as a missionary to evangelize this town. "Look at it," he says. "This is a great trade centre, on the main road to Bushire. Along that road Henry Martyn lived and prayed and preached. The people then were hostile. To-day they are friendly and

accessible. We are called to evangelize them now, tell me how?" What lay behind this was the study he had been making of the conditions of life, particularly among the young men. This town looks fair and beautiful, but it is a sink of iniquity. Immorality is rampant, vice of every kind lures the young men to disaster, drinking is on the increase, and probably half the population take opium. Then he took me to see some youths who had found the road to purity through the Gospel. They had been publicly baptized, and they were witnessing to their faith. But they too spoke of the need for some practical scheme for helping their comrades.

We discussed together the possibilities of club work on Y.M.C.A. lines, and then I said: "Now give me some facts to take to England." Here are the facts. In the hospital seventy-five out of every hundred patients are suffering from venereal disease. Children, boys and girls of thirteen and fourteen, are frequently admitted suffering from the same trouble. Behind this lies a terrible story of immorality that cannot be related here. The men have nowhere to go at nights and temptation is flung in their way. Can we say to them: "Come and listen to the addresses at the meetings," and do nothing to help them in their temptation?

Twenty-five per cent of the revenue of Persia comes from opium. Everywhere I went I saw miles of poppy fields. It is the most important crop in the country and people who have begun to grow it for export purposes have fallen victims to the opium habit themselves. The mother uses the poppy heads when dried to make the babies sleep, thus implanting in them from their earliest days the desire for opium. "It is said that of the 60,000 inhabitants of Kerman, 25,000 are [opium] addicts. What can be definitely stated is that the habits of eating and smoking opium are very widespread and are found in all classes of society and in both sexes, though much more common in men than in women. Further it can be definitely stated that the abuse of opium has increased very much during the last fifty years, and is still increasing. An old merchant, an authority on the subject, put it this way: 'Fifty years ago we used to consume quite a small amount

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of the opium we produced. Nowadays our consumption equals what we export if it does not exceed it.'"<sup>1</sup>

The backward condition of Persia is a frequent topic of conversation among Persians, and although they mention the lack of education and other things they seldom leave out opium. From cabinet ministers to small shopkeepers, all assert that opium is a national disaster. The effects are seen in the children who, where their parents are opium addicts, are generally poor in health and of weakened character from the start. Young men with all the promise of life before them are rendered useless in a few months through opium. The nation loses potential power and strength daily through this habit, and although the evil is admitted the only help towards a solution at the moment is the relief doctors try to give, and this is no remedy for it is not preventive in its influence.

We come back to Shiraz. The foundations of a young and vigorous church have been laid. Converts from Islam are coming forward in increasing numbers but we are building up the work in surroundings that are full of danger, and Christians must take note of social conditions among the people they evangelize. The Gospel does offer a remedy, but it requires the application of the Gospel to the problem itself, not simply to a few individuals who are fortunate enough to see the dynamic Christ offers.

Here was the burden upon my friend's mind. He had initiated football among the boys and teams were springing up. Healthy exercise was doing much to help these lads; but with sunset came a cessation from games and the boys asked: "What can we do now?" The club idea grew as we discussed the situation, and I said: "Why not make a beginning with a Y.M.C.A.? Through such an institution popular opinion could be moulded, social service started among those who were gripped by vice, and a cleaner atmosphere created. Through it, too, would come another opportunity of demonstrating to Persia the Gospel in action." I came home and met a group of Y.M.C.A. leaders and put this appeal before them, and before long I hope that a start will be made

<sup>1</sup> *The Opium Question with Special Reference to Persia.* By A. R. Neilligan, p. 30.

to reach the youth of Shiraz by providing healthy accommodation, recreation, classes, and social service. The young men who will form the nucleus of the Y.M.C.A. are all keen Christians, and they will see to it that the work is infused with a strong Christian life where men can find in a personal and spiritual experience the power to overcome evil and to do good.

I refer again to Shiraz so that we may see the work as a whole. So far we have looked at needs and appeals for help and now we must retrace our steps, for, as we know, this was the first town in Persia to have a resident missionary and it was from here that Persia received the New Testament in her own tongue. Martyn in 1811 described this town as a "fruitful field." In 1883 Bishop French visited Shiraz. Like his predecessor he soon found openings among the Moslems and wrote enthusiastically of the friendliness of the people towards the Gospel. He relates how "a general in the army and a sheikh called. They both wanted copies of the Bible. They inquired particularly about the new birth, what it meant, how it was attained, which gave occasion for bringing out the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit."

Evangelism in those days was not so easy as the good Bishop imagined. Shiraz knew that he was a visitor and an English bishop, and they treated him with respect, but when a young colporteur of the B. & F.B.S. tried to follow up the work he found notices posted on the gates and walls warning people not to buy his books. He was bastinadoed and beaten, but he returned to the town, sat down, and sold more books than ever. This was in 1883, more than seventy years since Shiraz had first seen Martyn. Another gap followed and it was not until 1896 that the notice of the C.M.S. was again drawn to this town and its possibilities, and again this was due to the friendliness of the people. The sales of Bibles in Persia had trebled between 1891 and 1896, and Bishop Stuart wrote home urging that Shiraz should be occupied. He told how even the mullahs sometimes "publicly praised the Bible and recommended the people to purchase and read it." Thus in 1811, in 1883, and in 1896 appeals had reached England. They had all told the same story. The experiences of Martyn,



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Bishop French, and Bishop Stuart were strikingly alike. The " baser sort " opposed but many people were eager to hear about the Gospel.

Efforts to go forward were again frustrated and it was not until 1900 that missionaries went to live at Shiraz and to establish a permanent mission station there. Work commenced and a school was opened. A medical service was started and evangelistic services were held regularly. For nine years the missionaries laboured on until in 1909 the station had to be closed for lack of workers. Again there followed a blank period when for fourteen years no one was available for Shiraz.

In 1923 the long looked for opportunity came and the hospital was restarted with two doctors and a sister. Later on a clergyman was sent there and a woman missionary for evangelistic work. This was the staff I found there on my visit. The hospital dispensary I have already mentioned. The hospital itself is a private house converted for the purpose. Every available corner of space has been utilized but the congestion is terrible. However, a beginning has been made and the staff are bravely tackling the problems of extension.

This chapter is mainly one of ideals and hopes. The tribal people asking for a doctor, the youth of Shiraz appealing for Y.M.C.A. work, and the hospital too must come under this category. Land has been bought, plans drawn up for a fine new building, and efforts are being made to raise funds for building. There is no church building in Shiraz. The church consists of the living members of the Body of Christ but they are without a home. They worship in a private house and are also looking forward to building their own church soon. The principle of a witnessing Church is certainly being observed here. The evangelistic work is carried out by the missionaries and the converts but they employ no paid catechist. Every one does his bit, and people are being baptized. The work in Shiraz has had a chequered career. Many have been the disappointments but at last the call has found an answer, and a small, united band of workers are

praying and working for the extension of the Kingdom of God in this famous old place.

The most recent adventure in Shiraz commenced while I was there. A woman missionary educationist, who was born in Shiraz and speaks Persian with all the fluency of a native of the country, had been located to this station. She has known from her childhood the homes of the leading families and they begged her to come back and work among the upper-class families. Her plan was to enlist the support of the wealthy Persian residents for a school and to make it entirely self-supporting. The question was: Would Moslems finance a purely Christian institution? On reaching Shiraz she asked her old friends, and these Moslem ladies in their beautiful palaces encouraged her to go ahead. One gave money for rent, another for furniture, and so on until all the initial expenses had been covered. Two ladies of rank offered to become voluntary teachers so the problem of staff was made easier. This school is unlike any other in Persia. In the morning classes are run for girls and in the afternoon for young wives. They all pay high fees and the most remarkable thing is that in spite of Moslem money and support the Bible is taught in this school every day. This is a significant fact and a sign of the changes coming over the people both in their attitude to Islam and to Christianity.

This is a strange story of beginnings. It began in 1811 and yet it is only really starting now. A hundred years have worked a revolution in thought and outlook and this little band of missionaries stand on the threshold of a new day. Before them is the bright prospect of advance, development, and triumph. But—and it is a big but—will they be let down as others before them were? Will this new effort be just an episode or will it develop into the permanent establishment of the Church of Christ in Shiraz?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BUILDING OF A PERSIAN CHURCH

I CAME to Yezd across a storm swept plain, through a blinding hurricane of sand and dirt. The columns of sand swirling round with cyclonic fury reach up to the clouds and travel across the plain like the wraith of another world. The Arabs call them sand devils because they believe that these columns are raised by the jinn in flight. Our car was enveloped in dust as we neared Yezd ; on one side we could see the towers where the Parsis place their dead, while on the other the mosques of Islam reared their minarets. The houses of Yezd have towering square pillars rising from them. As one approaches they appear to be fluted but on closer inspection they are seen to be a four square tower with openings on each side. These openings have a clear passage down through the house even to the basement. They are built to catch the wind to cool the house in the hot days.

Yezd stands in the middle of this great dry plain. It was founded by Alexander the Great as a penal settlement for prisoners. It now has a population of about 30,000, and was occupied by the C.M.S. in 1898. We gather some idea of the disturbed state of the country and the difficulties facing missionaries at that time from the fact that in three separate years after the commencement of work, riots occurred in the town which, on each occasion, led to the flight of the Governor, and might have meant the massacre of all the Europeans. The riots were political and in no way connected with the Mission, but the ringleaders had been patients in the hospital and out of gratitude they protected European lives. Through storm and riot the hospital work went on, and in 1902 Major Sykes told the Royal Geographical Society that " thanks to the unwearying devotion of Dr. White of the C.M.S. the tone of the people of Yezd had been completely changed from

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fanatical opposition to Europeans into adopting a friendly attitude."<sup>1</sup>

Yezd is the chief centre in Persia of the Parsi community. In spite of Arab invasions and Moslem persecutions there is still a remnant of the old followers of Zoroaster, about 8000 in number, and it was a Parsi merchant who provided the first building for the hospital. When I reached Yezd I found both men's and women's hospitals filled with patients, but sorely in need of additional staff. For some time the men's medical work had had to be carried on by a woman doctor. The situation was eased by the arrival of a man doctor from China who, unable to carry on there because of the rebellion, had gone to Persia to give temporary help. Since then an additional man doctor has sailed for Persia and money has been provided for another.

Race antagonism still prevails in Yezd, and it is impossible at present to combine in one school the pupils from both Moslem and Parsi homes. Two girls' schools are therefore being run, one for each section of the community. The parents are very jealous lest any man should look upon the face of a girl, and when the government inspector of education wished to examine the school he was only allowed to do so on condition that a curtain was drawn right across the room and the pupils made to sit on one side and the inspector on the other. He had to call his questions over the curtain and the girls answered back, but the man was not allowed to see a single girl. This was the only condition under which the Moslems would agree to the inspector visiting the school at all. There was at one time a flourishing C.M.S. boys' school in Yezd, but owing to lack of funds and staff it had to be closed. While I was there the people petitioned for it to be re-opened and the missionaries were unanimously of opinion that it was an urgent need.

I was privileged to take part in the consecration of the new church in Yezd. It is a beautiful building, Persian in style and design and a worthy centre for the spiritual life of the growing Christian community. The ordained missionary

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *History of C.M.S.* by E. Stock, vol. IV, p. 134.

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stationed in Yezd had purchased some windows from Persian houses and had carefully taken out the fine glass and pieced it together again for the windows of the church. It is difficult to describe the loveliness of this work, but it was a sheer joy to sit and look at this specimen of one of Persia's ancient arts. There is a large dome in the centre of the church, and outside are two rooms where the congregation can meet after service for social fellowship. In England we are so accustomed to regard our churches as places of worship and nothing else. We often forget that in a Moslem country the converts to Christianity lose at baptism their social life which is inseparably bound up with Islam. The church in Persia has to be not only a place of worship but a real home for Moslem converts, and in which the new converts must find a fellowship and a social life which takes the place of the life they have lost through conversion.

After the consecration service was over we all moved into the courtyard to these two rooms. The men sat in one and the women in another. Tea and cakes were handed round, and new members were given a welcome and made to feel at home. Social differences disappear in such an atmosphere and all feel they are one family, joined by ties of a spiritual life and fellowship that unites them in a common cause. In this same compound guest rooms have been built where the church, as a church, can offer hospitality to any Persian Christians passing through the town. This again marks a new development in the work. The Persians know the difficulty of a convert who is travelling about the country, and here such an one finds a warm welcome and a church which provides for his need.

Church building in Persia must naturally be upon Persian lines, and I found at every mission centre the same need for a social intercourse to give the sense of a community life and to hold the members together as a body. In Kerman an attempt to meet this need is being made by the opening of a club. The church members have joined together, rented a nice house, filled it up with guest rooms for hospitality, reading rooms, and a large room for meetings. While in Kerman I was the guest

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of the church and lived at the club. One day a week the women have the club to themselves and can invite their Moslem sisters to come and meet the Christian women of the town. In this way a great opportunity is afforded for that quiet witness to the Gospel which is so effective in Persia. The men claim another day and draw around them the young men who are interested in Christianity. I saw the large room packed with women one afternoon for a gospel meeting and as I talked with them afterwards I saw how the message is permeating Persian life. The church itself is a witnessing church and every one is regarded as an evangelist. All are expected to take some share in the spiritual life of the community whether it be by visiting in the homes, the selling of scripture portions, the leading of prayer meetings, or the direct preaching of the Gospel. There are of course failures in every church, but I was greatly impressed by the way the Persian converts regarded both the church and the task of evangelism as peculiarly their own. Persia will never be evangelized by paid agents from a foreign country, and in fact the policy of having paid agents at all is fraught with serious difficulties. Persians are being encouraged to regard the task of evangelism as a voluntary one to be undertaken in some form or other by every member of the church.

The Persians to whom I spoke were quite definite in their ideas about the Church. They did *not* want a Church of England in Persia. They were building up a Persian Church on Persian lines to express Persian Christian thought and culture, and while they accepted episcopacy as the right method of church polity they were emphatic in their demands that it should be a constitutional episcopacy and that the government of the Church should be in their own hands. The youth of Persia is fiercely national. The new life and thought that are surging through the country find expression in a patriotic sentiment and idealism that seek to glorify and make great their beloved fatherland. In the Church there are a considerable number of young men, all ardent in their national aspirations, and the nationalism of the day affects the outlook of the Christians toward their Church. They want a free and

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independent nation and they stand quite as strongly for a free and independent national Church. This has its dangers, as well as its opportunities, and missionary leaders have before them the serious task of combining in their church building a national Church, self-governing, self-expanding, self-supporting, with the great ideals of a one united catholic Church that is universal and international.

Persia in its aim for a national Church must be guided along lines that will keep it in communion with the great Churches of other countries and in particular with the ever-widening Anglican Church throughout the world. Difficulties arise at times between western missionaries and Persian Christians. The missionary sees the intricacies and difficulties of the problem more clearly than the Persian, and the Persian is sometimes inclined to be impatient because more power is not given to him at once.

An infinity of love and patience is required, and not a little tact and wisdom by the missionaries. Hitherto everything has been in their hands. Now authority is passing into the hands of the Church. The members elect their own parochial councils and missionaries have to stand for election upon exactly the same basis as Persians. There are no special privileges accorded to the Englishman. If the church members want him on their council they elect him, but if they think they can do just as well without him they elect some one else. Such a stage of transition is not easy; and the missionary as the dominant force must recede and in his place must come to the front the Church acting corporately. Leadership of the Church is therefore no longer a matter of western domination. The missionary is a member of the Church and his leadership is such as the people voluntarily accord to him. Missionaries are holding a place of leadership just in so far as they cease to control by authority and work through fellowship. The Persian realizes his weaknesses and his need of foreign help and guidance, and he will willingly seek this as long as he does not feel it is being imposed upon him.

When the missionaries first founded churches in Persia they

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introduced a hymnal from the West and translated English hymns into Persian and set them to English tunes. As the young Church grew it revolted against so western a type of praise. The hymns, they said, were not good Persian, they did not express Persian thought, and as for the tunes they were horrible! Some of us who have heard certain hackneyed tunes at missionary meetings in England for nearly a generation are inclined to agree with the stricture.

But the Persians were thinking of their own music through which the country had for hundreds of years expressed its soul. These converts sought for music that had behind it all the national sentiment of ages. They knew the appeal of the Koran to the heart when it was chanted in an eastern rhythm. They had seen how the emotions could be stirred by it, and now they had become Christians they were offered as a substitute purely western music which they could not understand and which made no appeal to their heart. To the missionaries much in Persian music seemed crude or meaningless, but they put aside any prejudice they had and sank their own feelings in trying to meet the difficulty. It became necessary to adapt Persian music for religious purposes and now the Church has a new collection of hymns set to Persian music. "It is amazing," says one missionary, "to see the effect a Persian hymn set to Persian music can have on people who have been giving listless attention to a service with queer incomprehensible European music. Seeing this tremendous enthusiasm, it seems to me that there remains a great deal to be done in making it of use for evangelistic itineration. What we want for this purpose is a sort of saga of the life of Christ, in simple good Persian, which, set to one or two of the old Persian tunes, carefully selected so as not to give a wrong impression, can be sung, in sections, by evangelists in village work. I expect it is the experience of most of us that once a hymn has been sung in a courtyard of a village home, at all the other visits one is begged to sing. For the illiterate people of the villages this is of tremendous value for we all know what a help a tune or chant is to memorizing. It appears that as a method of approach this has a great future. No



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means can be overlooked which will make our listeners feel that Christianity is not merely an importation, but something which may belong to them."

All this serves to emphasize the place of the missionary in the Church. He ceases to be an overseer and becomes a fellow-member. The barriers of race have to be broken down and the missionary seeks to become identified with his Persian fellow-workers and to make his thought and outlook as thoroughly Persian as possible. A farmer must know the soil in which he is to sow the seed ; and the young Church is keeping before the missionaries an insistent demand that they shall become Persian through and through, that they shall understand Persian manners and customs and soak themselves in Persian thought.

This Church, it must be remembered, is not being built up solely from Moslem converts, for in it are men and women who were formerly Jews, Parsis, Bahais, and followers of the Ahl-i-Hakk or People of the Truth. The bond between them is that they have been and are all members of one nation. They seek therefore to express their faith as a vital contribution to Persian nationalism and to the solution of the grave problems confronting the country in its efforts towards regeneration. When recently a census was being taken in Persia and a form of registration had to be signed by every subject of the Shah, one of the questions asked was : " What is your name ? " A Christian went to the office to fill in his form and wrote his new Christian name. Another question was : " What is your father's name ? " And here the man had to write a Moslem name. The registrar at once noticed this and said : " You cannot be a Christian if your father was a Moslem. The law does not make any provision for this." The Christian said : " I am a Persian, a loyal subject of the Shah, a nationalist, and a Christian, and I demand the liberty and freedom that is my right to choose my own religion." A long argument followed, and in the end the Christian won his point and was entered in the books as a Christian. Behind this lies more than just the public avowal of his faith. The interesting thing was that this man refused to see in

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Christianity anything foreign. He refused to admit that he had political loyalty to any other country because his faith had come to him in the first instance from foreigners. He claimed that the Christian faith did not denationalize him but made him a better Persian. Because foreigners have planted the Gospel in Persia the converts do not look to Great Britain or America in any other way than as two of many foreign lands. They do not scruple to criticize England when they think that she is interfering in the affairs of their land. No, these Christians remain Persian, and by doing so they are laying the foundations of an indigenous Church which must be wholly Persian.

Two primary needs stand out as we study the growth of this young Church. First is the need for adequate training of ordinands, catechists, and teachers, and through them the more efficient training of the whole Church to carry the responsibility of leadership and self-government, that the Church may be truly of the soil, really Persian, and may be enabled to bear its own witness to the people of the country. This involves some method of Bible teaching that will equip the youth of the Church particularly to carry on and extend evangelism upon a voluntary basis.

The second great need is the provision of literature for the Church. " Piled one above another, all the Christian literature available in the Persian language makes a stack fifteen inches high." The complete Bible has been translated, and thanks to the vigorous work of the B. & F.B.S. it is finding its way into every town in the country. There are some small books such as a harmony of the Gospels, Sunday-school courses, Studies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and some Bible helps. The Prayer Book in its entirety has been translated, together with some devotional works.

But the Church needs something much more thorough than all this if it is to grow strong. Commentaries on the Bible are in course of preparation and there is demand for a book on Church History. Translations of foreign books are good as far as they go, but the Persian Church needs men of their own race and tongue who will write in Persian and express

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the Christian faith in the language of Persian life. To expect the Church to do this without giving it the necessary training is to ask for the impossible. Behind this problem of literature lies still the need of training. Under the new Government education in Persia is going ahead at an amazing pace. With the increase of literacy comes the ever-widening opportunity of evangelism through the printed page. If the Church is to rise to this task it must be an educated Church, whose members can hold their own with the thinking people of the land. Its literature must be of the best and written in Persian style if it is to attract thinking men who are seeking to lead their country through transition to prosperity.

The Church is small, very small at present, but it is a witnessing Church. It is a praying Church and it is a Persian Church. It has all the elements that give promise of a great future. It is growing daily and in its growth it still looks to us in England to supply that spiritual help that will enable it to go from strength to strength until Persia owns the name of Christ as Lord and King.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TOWARDS THE ONE CHURCH

WE have already seen that while the C.M.S. was developing work in South Persia, the American Presbyterians were building up another Church in the north. While Persia was left without roads and means of communication these two Churches and two missionary agencies carried on a separated work with but few points of contact. The missionaries met occasionally to talk over problems, but the two communities were so divided by distance that they knew little of each other. Thus there grew up two Churches, the one Presbyterian and the other Episcopal.

In recent years the building of new roads, the advent of the motor as a means of transport, and the better security in the country have made it easy for people to travel. Church members in the north have visited the south and *vice versa*. The two Churches have suddenly discovered by the elimination of distance that they are neighbours, and the missionaries have found many new avenues for co-operative effort. The old scheme which defined geographical areas no longer keeps apart the growing Christian communities ; while overlapping has been avoided yet the missionaries have found that isolation may only be an easy way out of a problem that must be faced more thoroughly than by a policy of segregation. Missionaries may agree to work in defined spheres, but they cannot prevent Persian Christians from meeting one another and from asking awkward questions about faith and order.

Literature is a fruitful field for co-operation. In the recent educational difficulties the missionaries have acted as one body, and in evangelism there has been a free exchange of ideas. But when the missionary opens the door for co-operation with Churches other than his own he is making a channel through which new life can flow. The young Church is quick to see

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the importance of this, and as its interests are mainly centred in the growth of the Church they immediately begin to apply the principle of co-operation to the Church. Here they find themselves up against an unexpected difficulty. These two bodies of Christians from England and America have long traditions, customs, and rules of worship, laws governing faith and order which have their roots deep in the old controversies of the West. The young Persian knows little of western theological and ecclesiastical disputes. He is not worried by any traditions. Episcopacy is not to him either in the north or in the south a matter of controversy, and he is completely puzzled at the things that seem to separate the two Christian groups of devoted missionaries. It seems as though the missionaries by co-operation have dug a new river bed and allowed the water to flow so far, but then seeing the stream increasing in size and force are attempting to build a dam to prevent its going any farther. This, of course, is not in the least true of the missionaries, but it illustrates the sort of picture presented to the minds of Persians who are working for a united Church in Persia and find that there are barriers to reunion that have their foundation in England and America, not in Persian soil at all. The Persian point of view is that they will not belong either to an American nor an English Church but only to a Persian Church, and as they on the material side see centralization and unity as the keystone in their country's progress, they are convinced that on the Christian side the only hope for the future lies in one united Persian Church.

In 1926 an All-Persia Inter-Mission Conference was held, and at that gathering every mission station was represented. The delegates were mainly missionaries and they surveyed the whole field of work. They discussed new methods of co-operation and they came face to face with the problem of church unity and the demands of the Persian Christians for a united Church. The problem was approached from the angle that there is one Church only in Persia and that the task of the missionary is to prevent disunion. The Persians certainly regard the work in the north and south as one, and they feel

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no dividing barriers when they meet among themselves. This sense of spiritual unity could not, however, blind their eyes to the fact that on matters of church polity they were seriously divided. "What a triumph it would be," said one speaker, "if Persia should set before the world an example of real Christian unity from the very beginning of the foundation of the Church. Let us co-operate in establishing a Persian Church, not American and not English. The day has now come not simply to talk about church unity but to live it. The Persians want one Church, a Persian Church. They should have it."

In the findings of this conference we have the following statement: "We rejoice in and return thanks to God for the fine spirit of unity and harmony that now exists among the Christian forces at work in Persia, and it is our conviction that we should use every endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit. We believe that there should be one undivided Church of Christ in Persia and that it is a paramount privilege and duty of us all to work for the founding and growth of such a Persian Church."

Here at last was a lead to the young Church. The missionaries had not feared to face a great issue. The following year (1927) an Inter-Church Conference was held in Isfahan. It met for two weeks at the Stuart Memorial College. To this gathering came many representatives of the churches of the north and south. Among them were Moslem converts, one of whom had been a mullah, another had been a doctor of Islamic law, and yet another was the son and grandson of two of the most famous highwaymen who ever terrorized travellers on the Persian roads.

There were present the first two ordained men of the Church in South Persia, who were converts from Islam. Another delegate was the evangelist from Kerman who had been a priest in that interesting sect known as the People of the Truth. Side by side with these converts sat Armenians and Assyrians, converts from Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Men and women sat in council together and "Persian women boldly debated in conference and committee, proving themselves fitted to take a leading part in the affairs of their Church."

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The first day was taken up with reports from the churches, and every church had a story to tell of progress, baptisms, and increased opportunities. One of the first steps taken was the appointment of a "Home Mission Board," consisting of three Persian converts and one Armenian. No foreigner was put on this committee as all wished this task to be regarded from the first as essentially one for the Persians. The paper on pastoral work, strange to say, was read by a woman. Why not? She carried the whole conference with her as she told of the need of pastoral work among Persian women, work which can only be done effectively by women.

An official statement put out by the conference with unanimous approval states: "We know of no other country in the world where this sense of spiritual unity is deeper and we rejoice in and give thanks to God for His rich blessing which we look upon as the work of the Spirit. Along with this we feel that the time has come when this inward unity must receive a fuller outward expression than it yet has, if it is to abide. We feel that if the Church in Persia is to be one in body as well as in spirit, is to possess a unity that is evident to those outside, the time has come when we must begin to lay the foundations of the united Church of Christ in Persia."

It was generally felt that it was too early to try to effect a complete organization of a single Church. One obstacle was the need of all young Churches for more education in the meaning, organization, and history of the Church to enable them to appreciate better the problem of a local reunion in relation to the wider issue of the Church as a whole. Another obstacle was the fact that the Anglican representatives were not free to conclude such a union without reference to Lambeth and without the general consent of the bishops. This meant a postponement of definite action until the bishops should meet at Lambeth in 1930. Some fundamental principles were agreed to as a basis for any further reunion. These dealt with the authority of Holy Scripture, the acceptance of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and the meaning of the Church as the Body of Christ. The clergy are to be regarded "as representatives of the whole Church and as receiving

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their authority and commission from the Church as a whole." One important declaration deals with church order. "We feel that in the united Church of Persia the offices of bishop and presbyter should be preserved in some form, and that at the same time the rights of the local congregations, in accordance with New Testament teaching, should be fully guarded so as to produce and preserve the harmonious working of the whole body of the Church and to prevent undue concentration of power in the hands of a single person or group of persons." In these steps towards a national reunion all agreed that nothing should be done that might "be regarded by the Catholic Church as prejudicing in any way the larger unity for which we all pray."

Now we come to a third stage. Before looking at its demands let us turn back for a moment to the men who laid the foundations.

It was the example and heroism of Bishop French who laid down his life at Muscat in Arabia which gave to Persia one of its greatest leaders—Bishop Edward Stuart. After many years of missionary service among Moslems in India and seventeen years as Bishop of Waiapu, New Zealand, he offered in 1894 to go to Persia, not as a bishop but as an ordinary missionary. When he arrived the converts from Islam could be numbered on the fingers of one hand. One mission station only, and that the Armenian village of Julfa, was occupied by the C.M.S. Before he left sixteen years later, the Moslem towns of Yezd, Kerman, Shiraz, and Isfahan were occupied and more than 200 converts from Islam had been baptized in Isfahan alone. Great is the debt which the Church in Persia owes to him. He was a true leader in its spiritual development, and with the generous help of his personal friends he did much to provide the necessary material equipment.

The consecration in 1912 of the Rev. C. H. Stileman, secretary of the C.M.S. Mission, gave Persia its first Bishop, but after only two years he had to return to England on account of ill-health. His knowledge of things Persian, his grip of the language, and his acquaintance with Moslem religious thought enabled him to do a valuable work even in



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that short time, and to prepare the way for what was to follow.

When Bishop Linton succeeded him the demand for a native ministry was beginning to make itself felt, and it was he who took the bold step of ordaining a Moslem convert to the charge of the church at Isfahan and who presided over the Inter-Church Conference in 1927. The stage in the Church's development which has now been reached calls for a great and fearless lead. The Church will unite whether the people of England and America agree or not. At present the leadership in this matter is in the hands of the missionaries, but the Church will not wait indefinitely until we settle our differences at home. The Persian Church sees the goal, and while it is prepared to go slowly and patiently, yet it insists upon reunion in the near future. If the Lambeth Conference in 1930 and the Presbyterian Synod in America back up these aspirations and proposals the way will be clear and union will come. But if the proposals are turned down or referred back for fuller consideration there is grave danger that the Persians may go ahead by themselves and unite in spite of the older Churches.

We have travelled a long way since Henry Martyn first disputed with Moslems in Shiraz about the Christian faith. We have seen the disappointments and the delays, the first openings, and the opposition and fanaticism of the people. We have watched through the dark night of persecution and disorder and we have seen the dawn of a new day in Persia. We have marked the gradual building up of mission stations, and the breaking down of prejudice through medical work. We have witnessed the first incentive towards an educational system by missionaries who were pioneers of the new school system throughout the land. We have been thrilled by the growth of social service and we have admired that little band of missionaries, who have laboured on, ploughing, tilling, and sowing the seed until we with them have emerged upon a new day of opportunity and hope. We have rejoiced in the growth of the young Church, and we have seen it increasing on Persian lines and becoming indigenous and self-expanding.

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We witness it to-day moving onward towards still greater things, leading the way in a bold attempt to solve the reunion difficulties and to form one united national Church of Persia.

May we never forget that noble band of workers, who for the love of Christ laid down their lives for the Gospel.

Shortly before I left Persia I visited the little cemetery in Julfa, and stood beside the grave of Dr. Ironside. She had gone out in 1905 and for sixteen years she laboured unceasingly for the salvation of Persia. In 1916 she wrote in *The Church Missionary Review* words that to-day sound strikingly prophetic : " The villages are open for teaching, and the people most ready to listen . . . God is working, and who can stay His hand ? Let us not doubt or be disheartened, but wait and watch in faith and hope. He is preparing for a great advance in Persia, and we do not know how soon the opportunity for it will be given. One question, a very serious question, I would ask myself and my readers : When our Captain gives the word to advance, *shall we be ready for it ?* "

These challenging words were written in 1916, and in 1921 Dr. Ironside was called to her rest. A life of great promise was cut short. It seemed another set-back in a long line of difficulties in Persia, but was it defeat or victory ? The missionaries who inscribed the words on her tombstone saw no sense of defeat, only the dying of the grain of wheat that it might yield a hundredfold in days to come. So they cut in the stone these words :—

She heard the call " Come follow "—that was all.  
Earth's joys grew dim, her soul went after Him,  
She rose and followed—that was all.  
Will you not follow if you hear Him call ?

I left Persia the next morning, and ringing in my ears were the words : " Will you not follow if you hear Him call ? " Dr. Ironside was right. Our Captain has given the word for advance. Are we ready for it ? The barriers are down. The open road lies before us, and the vision is still the figure of Christ down the road beckoning us on to share the unfinished task of the Church in Persia.

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